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for children
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From Insight to Impact 2025

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Contents

- 2 Chapter 1
Data and digital Innovation
- 24 Chapter 2
Cultural competence, diversity
and inclusion
- 32 Chapter 3
Workforce recruitment and
retention
- 36 Chapter 4
Child and adolescent mental
health, wellbeing and skills
- 44 Chapter 5
Early help and intervention
- 60 Chapter 6
Achieving stability for children in
care and care leavers

**‘INNOVATION CAN BE
DEFINED AS THE PROCESS
OF BRINGING ABOUT
NEW IDEAS, METHODS,
PRODUCTS, SERVICES,
OR SOLUTIONS THAT HAVE
A SIGNIFICANT POSITIVE
IMPACT AND VALUE.’**

Foreword

This report, the third to be produced by Coram's Innovation Incubator, seeks to collate projects and approaches developed from across the sector in a bid to tackle key challenges faced by children's services by thinking in new ways. It offers a space for lessons to be shared, products and approaches to be known about and – most of all – to celebrate the people effecting change across the country as a collective force for positive change.

What is innovation?

Innovation can happen at any stage in the development of an organisation or service and at any level within it. It can feature simply replication and adaptation or, on rare occasions, a completely new approach. Yet it always requires an innovator, an individual champion who drives change and fosters an environment where others feel empowered to embrace change.

What is standard practice in one context may be innovation in another. In a regulated sector, ensuring equitable access and outcomes for children demands a commitment to continuous improvement.

Not all innovation delivers real value – some ideas may seem ground-breaking but prove unsustainable. An innovation that seems brilliant, but cannot be afforded or accessed, is not the basis for sustainable change.

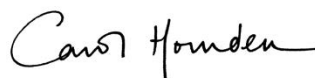
So much in children's social care is relational, and technology cannot replace a hug or a meal. Instead, innovation in this space focuses on the liberation of time through improved processes and increasing access and personalisation – themes explored in the first chapter of this report.

There is a keen desire to understand and harness the benefits of AI, data and research. This report highlights three platforms which are seeking to facilitate and harness them: the UK Centre for AI in the Public Sector, Nuffield's Children's Information Project, and the Coram Institute for Children.

Ultimately, existing or new methods of working depend on people. The chapter on workforce recruitment and retention showcases some of the ways that the sector is seeking to rise to the challenges of workforce sufficiency and to ensure cultural competency and diversity in both process and practice.

There is a strong focus on service methods and inclusion approaches in relation to child and adolescent mental health, whilst the chapter on early help and intervention features strongly the issues of engagement and creative approaches as well as cross-organisational working. Meanwhile, efforts to enhance access to services for 16- and 17-year-olds and to improve stability, identity and connection for children in care and care leavers illustrate the difference that can be made, with a particular focus on how acting on the views of children and young people can help make life good.

All of the examples in this report are evidence of a collective aspiration to lead in the creation of better outcomes for children.



Dr Carol Homden,
Chief Executive Officer



About the Coram Innovation Incubator

Children's chances in life still depend on where they live and who they live with, and 2.3 million children are living with risk in the UK. In the digital-first generation, up to 1 in 6 children face mental health challenges. Resources available do not reflect the scale of need and there are unacceptable variations in availability and quality of services, education and childcare.

The **Coram Innovation Incubator** exists to meet these challenges. As a membership organisation for leaders and managers within children's services, we support our members to develop, test, evaluate and scale innovative solutions that improve the quality and impact of children's services. We facilitate, celebrate and catalyse innovations that lead to significant and sustained impacts on children's life chances.

Innovation is the creation or adoption of new ideas, methods, or products. It encompasses both technological advancements and novel approaches in various fields. Innovation is the catalyst for positive change. It fuels progress, fosters economic development and shapes our future.

"Being part of the Coram Innovation Incubator has been absolutely beneficial to us. We have learned so much along the way and the generating and sharing of ideas, has encouraged innovation within our LA."

– Aneesa Kaprie, Transformation Lead, London Borough of Bromley

Chapter 1

Data and digital innovation

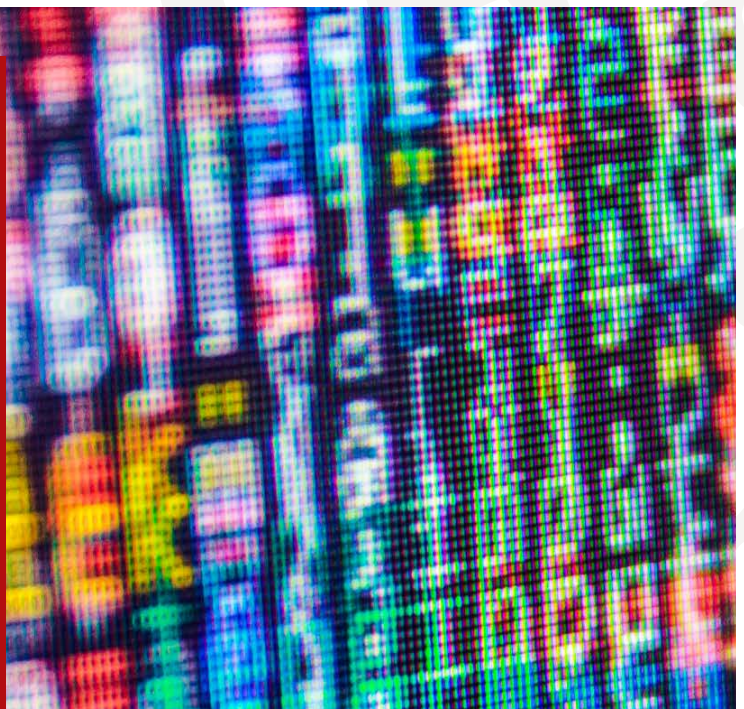
Digital and AI-driven solutions are reshaping children's social care, improving service delivery, better supporting professionals and enhancing engagement with children and their families. AI-powered policy assistants, automated case note summarisation, digital life story work and ethical data frameworks are just a handful of the technologies already transforming the landscape.

A major trend is the drive for automation and efficiency. AI tools like North Yorkshire's AI Policy Buddy and HelpFirst's case management solutions reduce administrative workloads, enabling practitioners to focus on direct support. However, challenges remain. Many practitioners are hesitant to adopt AI, concerned about job displacement or reliability.

Data security is another key issue, requiring stringent safeguards to protect vulnerable users. Integration with existing systems is often difficult due to fragmented digital infrastructures, and securing sustainable funding for these innovations remains a persistent challenge.

Despite these barriers, AI and digital tools are set to redefine social care. The case studies in this chapter illustrate a shift towards a more agile, data-driven future. Robust training and clear evidence of benefits are clearly vital to fostering confidence. Ethical innovation, collaboration, and user-centred design are all essential to ensuring that digital transformation leads to lasting, positive change in children's social care.

- 3 AI Policy Buddy
- 4 Kingston Council's integration of Magic Notes
- 5 HelpFirst: AI for complex needs management
- 8 Binti: Software Built for Child Welfare
- 9 After Cloud Storyteller App
- 10 Reflecting on the creation of Storyteller
- 11 MyPower App
- 12 Donut: An employee experience program
- 13 The Family Hub: A Digital Front Door
- 14 Transforming the Front Door
- 15 My Best Life
- 15 SMART Children's Services Copilot
- 17 MyLifePlan
- 18 The UK Centre for AI in the Public Sector
- 19 Simply Readable, an AI easy-read solution
- 20 Shore website
- 21 Use of generative AI tools
- 22 The Children's Information Project



AI Policy Buddy

By North Yorkshire Council in collaboration with [Leading AI Ltd.](#)

The North Yorkshire AI Policy Buddy project for children's social care is streamlining access to legislation, policies, and procedures. The project aimed to **simplify access to accurate, up-to-date information, reduce workload, and enhance service delivery.** The vision was clear: to empower staff, reduce workload, and enable a greater focus on direct work with children and families.

Initially trialled with 50 staff members, the tool's overwhelming success led to a rapid rollout to nearly 1000 practitioners. The AI-powered tool not only met but exceeded expectations, significantly improving efficiency, compliance, and staff satisfaction.

Key features include:

- Multi-lingual capabilities.
- Ability to provide comprehensive, cross-referenced answers tailored to specific queries.
- Ability to create bespoke guides for staff and the children and families they work with.

For example, the Policy Buddy was able to create a bespoke guide for a 12-year-old child about what to expect at their first Looked After Review, written with a Taylor Swift theme in French, to make it really personal to the child and the things they like.

The Policy Buddy can be used on desktop, mobile, by voice or text. This means it is accessible wherever staff need it and building professional confidence in new technologies. It also makes it easier to review and update policies, as well as track staff query themes, helping to identify possible areas where the team might want to enhance the council's training offer.

Prior to the introduction of the AI Policy Buddy, practitioners often relied on colleagues or managers for policy guidance, which:

- Created delays in accessing up-to-date information.
- Led to inconsistencies in practice due to reliance on informal knowledge-sharing.
- Added pressure for senior staff, reducing time for strategic oversight.

Additionally, the existing document storage system was difficult to navigate, meaning that practitioners often found one relevant document but missed supporting information. The Policy Buddy was able to resolve this by searching all available documents before producing an answer, ensuring comprehensive and accurate information.

The project launched with a two-month pilot involving 50 staff members. Within four weeks, overwhelmingly positive feedback led to a rapid expansion across the entire workforce.

Project leads Jonny Hoyle (Children and Young People's Service) and Cath Ritchie (Transformation Service) championed a phased approach, incorporating:

- Initial testing and feedback collection.
- Iterative improvements based on staff insights.
- A full rollout within just three months, demonstrating the team's efficiency and commitment.

The success of the project was underpinned by collaboration between multiple departments, including Technology, Transformation, Information Security, and Data Governance.

This whole-organisation approach ensured seamless integration into staff's daily workflows.

Key activities in the implementation process included:

- Developing the AI engine to interpret and cross-reference policies.
- Training staff to use the tool effectively.
- Embedding the tool into social work practice, making it a natural part of case management.

- The financial investment was modest, with the annual cost equivalent to purchasing six and a half iPhones. The tool's ability to improve efficiency and reduce unnecessary queries provided a high return on investment.

Challenges, such as ensuring staff adoption, were addressed through user-friendly design, responsive support, and ongoing feedback mechanisms.

The project delivered the following outcomes:

- Significant time savings, reducing the administrative burden on staff.
- Enhanced compliance, ensuring policies and procedures are followed accurately.
- Improved practitioner morale and confidence, with feedback including:
 - "The policy buddy has changed my life"
 - "I thought I would hate it (new technology) but I love it."

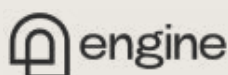
The AI Policy Buddy reconnected staff with legislation and procedures, providing a personalised service to children and families. The tool's ability to generate bespoke guides, such as explaining child protection conferences to an 8-year-old using a superhero theme, showcased its versatility and impact. The project's sustainability is ensured through ongoing support and plans to extend the tool to other council departments, including HR and Adult Services.

Several factors contributed to the project's success:

- A clear vision to empower staff and improve efficiency.
- Strong leadership with passionate communication.
- Quick wins and early successes in implementation, building trust in the technology.
- Cross-departmental collaboration, which ensured smooth integration.

Future areas for improvement include ongoing user feedback and continuous updates to the AI engine to keep pace with evolving needs.

See more: ["Our AI Policy Buddy: Transforming Children's Services in North Yorkshire."](#)



"I got into social work because I wanted to support people. When I am completing an assessment, review or any other interaction with people I support, Magic Notes allows me to maintain eye contact, listen accurately and critically reflect in the moment and it means that I don't have to worry about taking notes. As well as allowing me to focus on the person, Magic Notes provides me with a really accurate and detailed record and summary for me to review. It frees up time for me to focus on complex cases care, planning and the social workers in the team that I supervise."

– Senior Social Worker at Kingston Council

Kingston Council's integration of Magic Notes

By [Kingston Council](#) and [Beam Up Ltd.](#)

Magic Notes is a tool developed by Beam to **simplify and streamline the process of documenting and summarising care visit information**. By automating these administrative tasks, the tool allows frontline social workers to save at least four hours a week, giving them more time to focus on their clients. Starting in 2024, Kingston Council has been rolling out Magic Notes as part of its effort to enhance efficiency in social care services. Beam, a company dedicated to creating social impact through technology, including artificial intelligence, collaborated closely with Kingston Council to adapt the product to the needs of social workers.

Key features and adaptation:

- Originally designed for Beam's caseworkers, Magic notes was modified for use by social workers on mobile devices.
- The focus was on simplicity and usability, accommodating the varying levels of technical proficiency among social workers.
- Designed to support social workers' day-to-day work without adding complexity.

The demand for adult social care services has been growing across local authorities, presenting challenges to the sustainability of current systems. Data from the NHS Adult Social Care dashboard shows that new case demand has increased annually by 2-5% on average since 2017. Kingston, in particular, has faced a significant rise of approximately 14%. Traditionally, social workers take limited notes during client visits to maintain a personal connection, resulting in delays in completing reports. This project aims to tackle these issues by automating note-taking and summarisation, enabling faster report completion and freeing up time for direct client care.

The pilot phase yielded the following results:

- Case notes and assessments completed 50-60% faster.
- Supervision write-ups were reduced from 40 minutes to under 10 minutes.
- The transcript accuracy achieved over 96% accuracy compared to the 85% target.
- Beyond on-site visits, the tool proved useful for dictating notes for AI transcription and summarisation.

Social workers have emphasised that they often personalise the transcriptions and summaries to reflect their unique writing style and add additional details. This highlights Magic Notes as an assistive tool that complements their expertise rather than replacing it.

96% MAGIC NOTES-GENERATED
CASE NOTES ACHIEVED
OVER 96% ACCURACY

Kingston Council employed a data-driven approach to evaluate the financial benefits of Magic Notes. By focusing on the demonstrated time savings, the council identified opportunities to reinvest efficiency gains into preventive services. Specific use cases, such as supervision sessions, revealed time savings of around 75%, allowing the council to calculate the net financial benefits after accounting for the solution's costs. The scalability of Magic Notes suggests that it could potentially reduce the time spent on writing assessments and case notes by up to 50% across the board.

The project faced some technical challenges during its initial phase, including issues with name recognition, information repetition, and background noise affecting accuracy. However, the strong partnership between Kingston Council and Beam facilitated swift resolutions. Beam introduced features to mitigate background noise, enhance accuracy, and incorporate feedback mechanisms that allowed social workers to refine templates and workflows.

During testing, it became apparent that supervision processes required more than one standardised template. For instance, managers supervising senior staff discussed different topics compared to seniors supervising caseworkers. This feedback led to the creation of tailored templates to meet varying needs.

The success of Magic Notes in Kingston has inspired other councils to explore the tool's potential. The collaborative approach between Kingston Council and Beam has not only improved social care efficiency locally but also set the stage for broader adoption across the sector.

See more: <https://www.kingston.gov.uk/news/article/525/kingston-council-launches-ai-tool-to-free-up-time-for-frontline-social-workers>



HelpFirst: AI for complex needs management

By [HelpFirst](#)

HelpFirst demonstrates how **large language models (LLMs) can revolutionise case management by enabling caseworkers to work more efficiently and effectively**. By leveraging advanced AI, HelpFirst's solutions offer the equivalent of "1000 interns at their fingertips," reducing administrative burdens and unlocking new potential for improved service delivery. The results are better outcomes for vulnerable individuals, significant cost savings, and scalable solutions for the public and third sectors.

In the current landscape of social work, practitioners face overwhelming inefficiencies. Only 20% of their time is spent directly engaging with families, while 91% report emotional exhaustion due to administrative tasks. This systemic issue has led to backlogs, limiting the reach of services for those in need. HelpFirst's mission is to address these challenges using AI-powered tools designed to support caseworkers and vulnerable service users. By building solutions rooted in compassion, integrity, and craftsmanship, HelpFirst aims to transform the way services are delivered.

HelpFirst's technology suite includes:

Summarisation: AI capabilities that distil lengthy case notes into focused, actionable summaries. This enables caseworkers to quickly understand client histories and produce necessary documentation without sacrificing quality or detail.

Risk categorisation: Their topic classification technology employs advanced machine learning algorithms, trained to the use case, to look for specific risks in service user history. This helps practitioners prioritise urgent cases and ensure vulnerable individuals receive timely attention. The technology continuously learns from user feedback, improving its accuracy and relevance over time.

Visualisation: Their visualisation tools translate complex case data into intuitive, interactive displays, providing supervisors with clear oversight of their team's work. Additionally, risk indicator systems highlight areas needing immediate attention. These tools reduce cognitive load on staff and enable faster, more informed decision-making across all levels of an organisation.

The impact of HelpFirst's innovations is evident:

Childline: Summarisation tools achieved >90% quality assurance metrics and reduced write-up time from 12 minutes to seconds, enabling up to 60,000 additional counselling sessions annually.

- **Citizens Advice Scotland:** Improved case prioritisation and reduced stress for advisors, saving hundreds of thousands of pounds annually while enhancing client outcomes. Advisors unanimously reported spending more time on meaningful tasks and improved confidence in identifying urgent cases.

These results showcase the potential of AI to enhance efficiency, accuracy, and capacity in case management systems.

Key learnings include:

- The effectiveness of AI systems like LLMs depends on scale, and investment in model growth will accelerate their transformative potential.
- Implementing LLMs demands unique expertise that blends traditional digital product development skills with new approaches to managing AI's non-deterministic behaviour.
- Unlike sales or generic customer service, case management involves addressing diverse, ongoing, and urgent needs where failures can have life-or-death consequences. This necessitates solutions specifically tailored to the field.

HelpFirst's team, combining diverse skills and backgrounds, has been instrumental in achieving these outcomes. Their focus on casework allows them to learn from multiple clients with similar needs to design impactful, scalable solutions.

30%

**MORE COUNSELLING
SESSIONS A YEAR COULD
BE DELIVERED DUE TO
POTENTIAL TIMESAVINGS**

80%

**THE POTENTIAL TIME
SAVED ON WRITE-UPS**



2p

COST PER DOCUMENT

CASE STUDY: CHILDLINE (NSPCC)

Challenge:

- Childline handles 188,000 counselling sessions per year via webchat (~70%), voice and email
- Every session must be written up and risk assessed in case of the need for referrals or court evidence, and for working with partner organisations
- Average write up time = 12 mins and call length = 23 mins
- This means tens of thousands of hours are spent on write-ups per year, by Childline's hundreds of volunteers and staff
- Childline are only able to meet 56% of demand due to this admin burden
- The most time consuming tasks are writing a summary of the interaction, and tagging it with the most relevant topic(s)

Solution:

- HelpFirst worked with NSPCC staff to define the ideal structure of summaries
- Explored both off-the-shelf and custom-trained options for large language models, incorporating factors such as terms of use, understanding of Childline-specific language, potential value for money

- Summaries can now be generated for any transcript in the analytics platform. Labelling process implemented, to evaluate and improve summary quality based on NSPCC's requirements
- Explored topic modelling and classification (multilabel, individual and LLM). Recommended a method for generating a 'first pass' of topics for a counsellor to confirm or change, as well as a free text box for new ones to be captured

Outcomes:

- AI-generated summaries were evaluated by Childline staff to be hitting >90% of their standard QA metrics (assessing them to be impartial, accurate, focused and concise).
- Cost of generating each summary is £0.02
- Summaries load in only a few seconds
- Childline management deem the potential time saving on write-ups is 80%
- Now preparing for the next (MVP) phase of the project, to enable Childline staff to utilise this technology in their day-to-day work

Benefits:

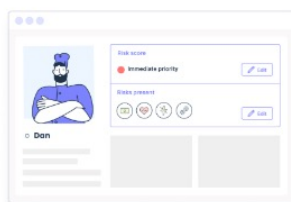
- The potential time saved would be enough to deliver another 60,000 counselling sessions a year (an increase of over 30%) in Childline
- In the NSPCC Helpline (for adults), the capacity gains could be even larger, as even more time is spent on write-ups
- This is aside from other practical applications, for example:
 - Summarising the contact history for volunteers/staff at the start of a contact
 - Speeding up the more complex reviews that need to be undertaken for young people who regularly return to the Childline service
 - Providing "live" summaries of ongoing interactions for shift managers to support better handovers

CASE STUDY: EXTRA HELP UNIT (CITIZENS ADVICE SCOTLAND)

Challenge:

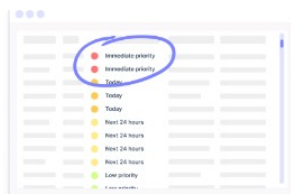
- HelpFirst won the CivTech 8 challenge set by Citizens Advice Scotland's Extra Help Unit: "How can technology help to quickly identify and prioritise support for people in the most vulnerable situations, starting with those having energy problems?"
- Citizens Advice Scotland's EHU liaise with energy suppliers to resolve errors, arrange friendly credit, and reconnect energy for families in vulnerable situations. With the cost of living crisis following Covid, they were overwhelmed with demand.
- EHU advisors would log in to see an overwhelming wall of text. They spent lots of time reading long case notes and writing email summaries for colleagues and suppliers. They feared someone slipping through the cracks - not being prioritised properly. Staff often burned out, so turnover was high.
- HelpFirst built an LLM-powered plug in to EHU's CRM system (D365).

Solution:



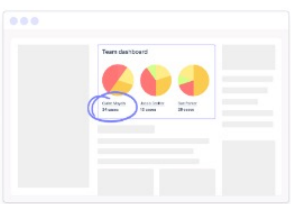
Risk alerts

Icons with text rollover for why the risk is present



Triage support

Highest risk cases are flagged for immediate attention



Supervisor dashboard

Casemix overview and safeguarding log

Outcomes:

- 100% of caseworkers say: "I can spend more time on the things I want to in my job"
- 100% of caseworkers say: "I can deal with urgent cases more quickly"
- 100% of caseworkers say: "I can prioritise cases more accurately"
- 100% of caseworkers say: "I am less stressed about missing something important in the case notes"
- 100% of caseworkers say: "I can switch between cases more quickly"

Benefits:

- Reduced cognitive load of case switching
- Better informal information sharing: new caseworkers learn best practice
- Less risk that vulnerable clients slip through the net
- Automated Subject Access Request process

See more: "From Overwhelmed to Empowered: AI's Real-World Impact on Citizens Advice Scotland"

"HelpFirst has redefined what safeguarding looks like at the EHU. In the past, we were all terrified of missing a service user's vulnerabilities. HelpFirst provides an AI safety net, catching what humans miss. It means we are making better decisions in high priority situations. We are confident we can see all vulnerable within 48 hours, even at peak demand. This represents an annual cost saving of hundreds of thousands of pounds and will make a profound difference to the wellbeing of our colleagues and service users."

George Holmes, Service Manager, Extra Help Unit, Citizen's Advice Scotland





Binti: Software Built for Child Welfare

By [Binti, inc.](#)

Binti's mobile-friendly platform, developed through extensive collaboration with youth, families, and social workers, **fosters partnership, improves outcomes, and saves social workers valuable time.** The platform offers tools for recruitment and application processes, case management, compliance, reporting, and more.

110,000

BINTI HAS FACILITATED THE APPROVAL OF 110,000 FAMILIES TO FOSTER OR ADOPT

Binti is committed to building software with a mission to ensure every child grows up in a family. With 400,000 children currently in foster care in the US and millions in orphanages worldwide, the challenges are immense. Research shows that 30% of the U.S. homeless population and 25% of prison inmates have experienced foster care. Binti aims to change these statistics by streamlining the fostering and adoption process through intuitive, user-friendly tools that address the critical shortage of foster families nationwide.

The platform is modular, allowing teams to use individual components or adopt Binti as a comprehensive solution. Designed to securely integrate with other systems, such as Medicaid, Binti fosters collaboration across service areas to support youth and families more effectively.

Key modules include:

- **Caregiver licensing:** Simplify the entire licensing and renewal process for families and caregivers with an online applicant portal featuring document upload and e-signature capabilities.
- **Caregiver management:** Streamline coordination with licensed caregivers via a single online portal, enabling efficient sharing of child information, paperwork collection, and documentation collaboration.
- **Family finding and engagement:** Identify, record, and engage a child's fictive and biological kin network to ensure they are supported by their closest connections.
- **Service referrals and prevention:** Manage service providers, request services, and track billing within one module, enhancing workflows and improving family outcomes.
- **Binti AI package:** Utilise features such as form auto-completion, transcription, language translation, and case note scraping to improve outcomes while saving time for social workers.

Since its launch in 2017, Binti has facilitated the approval of over 110,000 families to foster or adopt children. More than 12,000 social workers across 34 states and Washington, D.C., use Binti as their primary workspace, both in the office and the field. Agencies leveraging Binti's platform have, on average, increased the number of approved families by 30%, ensuring more children find loving homes.

CASE STUDY: SAN FRANCISCO'S HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

The Startup in Residence (STIR) program connects government agencies with startups to address civic challenges through technology. As part of this program, San Francisco's Human Services Agency (HSA) partnered with Binti to modernise its foster care system.

HSA needed a mobile-friendly, cloud-based solution to streamline the foster parent recruitment and approval

process. They sought to digitise the paper-heavy review, assessment, and placement workflow while enhancing the pipeline for prospective foster parents from initial interest through certification. Additionally, HSA aimed to reduce the time social workers spent managing caseloads and administrative tasks.

Over a 16-week residency, the Binti team worked closely with HSA staff to understand the foster family placement process and the challenges social workers face. Using this feedback, Binti developed a mobile-friendly web

application for prospective foster parents, making the process straightforward and user-friendly. The team also created tools to reduce the time social workers spent on foster parent applications, enabling them to focus more on their core responsibilities.

By the end of the project, Binti delivered a solution that simplified the foster care process for both prospective families and social workers. This collaboration highlights how technology can drive meaningful improvements in social care systems, ensuring more children can find the stability and support they need.

After Cloud Storyteller App

By [Coram](#) and [Dylogic Management Ltd](#)

After Cloud, an award-winning storytelling platform, is dedicated to creating impactful digital solutions for social good. By focusing on social care, heritage, and consumer needs, After Cloud has become a trusted partner for organisations aiming to enhance well-being and inclusivity. Its collaboration with Coram, a leader in children's services, has resulted in a ground-breaking digital repository called Storyteller. This platform is designed to support children in care, empowering them to document and share their life stories in an engaging, secure, and user-friendly way.

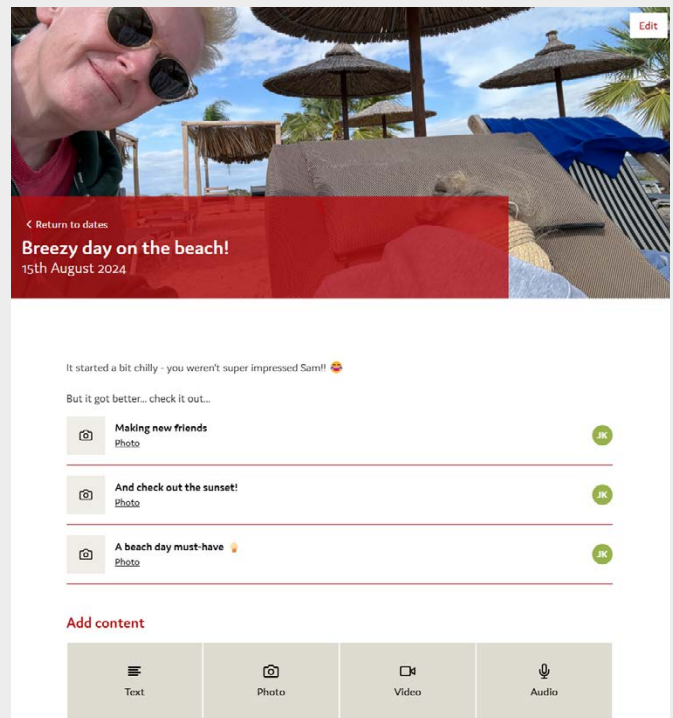
Storyteller provides a proactive and cost-effective solution for children's services providers. Leveraging After Cloud's expertise, it enables children, key workers, and managers to collaborate effectively, documenting activities and milestones that reflect best practices. The platform's intuitive interface ensures ease of use while maintaining strict privacy and safeguarding standards.

"Life story content should be available to all children who have spent time in care and not just adopted children"

Kevin Yong, Managing Director of Coram-i

Key features include:

- **Digital timelines:** Users can create and populate personal timelines with significant events, adding depth and context to children's life stories.
- **Multimedia uploads:** The platform supports text, photos, videos, and audio, allowing users to bring timelines to life with rich, full-colour multimedia.
- **Collaboration tools:** Foster carers, social workers, and other trusted individuals can contribute to a child's timeline, fostering a sense of connection and shared experiences.
- **Companion feature:** This functionality ensures that all children are provided with the ability to be 'included' through the support of a trusted third party, such as the key support worker or team around the child.
- **In-app communication:** Providers can demonstrate digital inclusion by facilitating communication with friends, family, and other stakeholders through customisable administrative permission settings.
- **Moderation and safeguarding:** Robust controls ensure the safety and security of all users.
- **Organisation dashboard:** Administrators can manage users and accounts efficiently with this centralised feature.



Through its partnership with Coram, After Cloud tailors its solutions to meet the unique needs of children in care. By prioritising personal experiences and journeys, Storyteller aligns with Coram's mission to provide child-centred support. The platform promotes effective communication and collaboration, helping children maintain strong connections with their support networks.

Core principles include:

- **Personalisation:** After Cloud emphasises understanding the unique needs of individuals, enabling tailored solutions that resonate with children and their caregivers.
- **Health and well-being:** Effective communication and collaboration are central to enhancing health outcomes and fostering community-based support.
- **Co-design and co-production:** Working closely with stakeholders, After Cloud ensures its products are designed with the people they serve in mind.
- **Expert guidance:** A steering group of senior thought leaders, practitioners, and users drives innovation and ensures best practices across social care and heritage initiatives.

Storyteller is transforming how children in care document and preserve their life stories. By enabling digital inclusion and fostering collaboration, the platform empowers children to build a stronger sense of identity and belonging. The partnership between After Cloud and Coram exemplifies how technology can enhance the lives of vulnerable children, paving the way for further innovations in social care.

See more: [After Cloud's Storyteller Platform.](#)



Reflecting on the creation of Storyteller

Storyteller is a secure place where digital content can be stored for children in care. I first had the idea for this app in 2016, when I was doing a lot of work with adoption services and saw how some struggled to put together life story books for children who were going to be adopted. At the time, I thought the app would be a good way of collating the content needed for a life story book as and when it was available, rather than trying to find it at the last minute when the book was being created.

However, I then started thinking that life story content should be available to all children who have spent time in care and not just adopted children. With the amount of photos and videos we take on our smartphones, there must be a huge amount of material available but when I talked to adults who had been in care they all said that hardly anything was shared with them from their time in care. They also said that they would have liked access to the content as a child, and not just after they left care, to help them form stronger memories and identities.

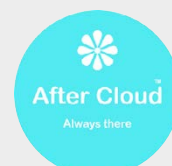
So that's what Storyteller will do, and it will be available to children while they are in care, with children owning the content. We want people in the child's life to also be uploading content, whether that's their social worker, carer or other individual who is important to the child (like a relative), and for that content to be curated in the app to create mini stories, to support therapeutic life story work.

The app is now ready to be piloted, thanks to our partnership with After Cloud. We are looking for organisations to work with us to test how the app is used and to inform its development path. We want children, professionals and carers to work with us to make sure the app makes the difference we are hoping for. There are some things we want to explore in particular, for example will content need to be moderated to ensure it is suitable for the child and how much support would a child need when looking at content.

We also want to explore how else the app could be used beyond traditional life story concepts. Could a parent record themselves reading a bedtime story, or the child's next carer record a video to introduce themselves and their home - it is this potential that excites me the most because the possibilities feel endless.

There are similar products available now, which tells me the idea is a good one! One difference for the Storyteller is that it will work on Android and iOS-based smartphones and tablets, and not just through a web browser. We have some other key differences, but I wouldn't want to give them away to the competition just yet. Contact us if you want to find out more. It has taken almost 9 years to get to this point, and I can't wait to see the impact it has.

**Article by Kevin Yong,
Managing Director, Coram-i**



MyPower App

By [Coco Operative](#), a Community Interest Company

MyPower is an app developed by Coco Operative **to enhance communication and collaboration between children's social workers, families, and multi-agency professionals**. Designed with input from end-users and grounded in co-production principles, MyPower addresses key challenges within children's social care, including difficulties in engaging families in case planning and the administrative burden faced by social workers. The app was evaluated through focus groups and interviews conducted by researchers at the University of Manchester, funded by the UKRI Participatory Research Fund.

Children's social care in the UK faces increasing pressures, including rising referrals, limited preventative services, and a focus on risk management over family strengths. Social workers often struggle to balance administrative tasks with meaningful time spent with families, with estimates suggesting only 20% of their time is spent on direct family engagement. MyPower aims to address these issues by streamlining case planning and communication, promoting family ownership of plans, and reducing time spent on bureaucratic, administrative tasks.

Key features include:

- **Collaborative case planning:** Families can access, update, and track progress on their plans through the app, fostering ownership and motivation.
- **Goal-setting tools:** Interactive prompts encourage collaboration between families and social workers, enabling personalised and achievable plans.
- **Streamlined updates:** Families and professionals can directly update plans within the app, reducing the need for social workers to manually gather and record information.
- **Engaging design:** The app uses vibrant colors and interactive graphics to make it intuitive and appealing for families and children.



The University of Manchester's evaluation found several key insights:

- **Improved accessibility:** MyPower offers families a central, private hub to access plans and updates at their convenience. However, concerns were raised about the reliance on text-based communication, with participants suggesting the inclusion of voice notes and visual tools to enhance usability.
- **Enhanced collaboration:** Social workers and parents saw potential for the app to improve accountability and communication. Families appreciated the transparency and ability to track progress, while practitioners highlighted the importance of integrating the app into relationship-building activities.
- **Time burden and usability:** While practitioners were concerned about the potential duplication of work if the app didn't integrate with existing systems, they recognised the app's potential to save time if appropriately streamlined. Simplicity and minimal text on the interface were identified as critical factors for usability.
- **Safety considerations:** Participants emphasised the need for clear guidelines on data security and managing sensitive family dynamics. Features such as restricted access for certain users and automated risk flags were recommended.

MyPower's design encourages intrinsic motivation by allowing families to visualise progress and take ownership of their goals. This aligns with evidence that personal goal-setting fosters competence and autonomy. Additionally, the app's automation features, such as reminders and notifications, can alleviate the burden on social workers, enabling them to focus more on direct family support.

The evaluation highlighted key areas for further development:

- **System integration:** Ensuring seamless compatibility with existing case management systems to avoid duplication of tasks.
- **Safety protocols:** Conducting risk assessments and incorporating safety features, such as managed access and content monitoring.
- **Implementation support:** Providing technical assistance through app champions and tailored training for practitioners and families.

MyPower demonstrates significant potential to transform children's social care by fostering collaboration, enhancing communication, and reducing administrative burdens. While further refinement and integration with existing systems are needed, the app represents a promising step toward more efficient and family-centred social work practices.

See more: [MyPower accessibility evaluation study](#)

Donut: An employee experience program

By [Donut Technologies Inc.](#)

Donut is a US-based employee experience platform that automates and scales an organisation's people programmes — from new hire onboarding to cross-functional team building — right within the tools an organisation already uses.

The problem Donut addresses is a lack of meaningful connections in workplaces, especially in hybrid or remote environments where opportunities for organic interactions are limited. This lack of connection can lead to disengagement, higher turnover rates, and reduced productivity. These challenges are not confined to corporate environments—they mirror issues seen in children's social care and social work recruitment in the UK.

In social care teams, the inability to foster a sense of team belonging and support contributes to burnout

and turnover among social workers. [The British Association of Social Workers \(BASW\)](#) has reported that social workers often feel isolated and unsupported, with many leaving the profession within the first few years.

Similar to how Donut facilitates connections to enhance engagement and retention, creating better structures for collaboration and peer support in children's social care could significantly improve workforce stability and morale. By applying principles of connection and engagement, children's services providers can begin to address these systemic challenges, ensuring better outcomes for both workers and the families they support.

Donut's platform leverages automation to seamlessly integrate into existing workflows, such as Slack and Microsoft Teams, enabling teams to connect in more impactful ways. Whether it's introducing new hires to team members, setting up virtual

coffee chats, or creating opportunities for cross-department collaboration, Donut's user-friendly design ensures easy adoption and high engagement rates.

Key features include:

- **Virtual intros and coffee chats:** Automatically pair employees for informal virtual meetups, fostering stronger relationships and breaking down silos.
- **Onboarding experiences:** Help new hires integrate smoothly into teams by connecting them with peers and mentors early in their journey.
- **Cross-team collaboration:** Facilitate connections across departments to encourage knowledge sharing, innovation, and teamwork.
- **Feedback loops:** Enable teams to gather insights and feedback on engagement initiatives to continuously improve their strategies.

CASE STUDY: REMOTE EMPLOYEE RETENTION WITH CAREMESSAGE

CareMessage, a nonprofit healthcare organisation, supports over 200 healthcare companies by facilitating patient-provider communication through its text-based engagement platform. When CareMessage transitioned from a hybrid structure to a fully remote workforce, the organisation faced challenges in maintaining team cohesion, fostering connections, and ensuring a smooth workflow for its employees.

As CareMessage moved to 100% remote operations, the organisation encountered several challenges:

- **Employee adjustment:** Employees at the headquarters expressed hesitations about adapting to remote work, including concerns about isolation and workflow changes.
- **Communication barriers:** The absence of in-office interactions risked reducing informal communication and connection among team members.

CareMessage leveraged Donut to create a three-pronged strategy to overcome these challenges:

- 1 **Gradual transition to remote work:** CareMessage introduced a phased approach to remote work, starting with designated work-from-home days and gradually increasing them. Donut facilitated connections during this transition by enabling employees to engage in virtual coffee chats and informal introductions, helping them adapt to the new routine.
- 2 **Building a sense of belonging:** A remote buddy system paired transitioning HQ employees with experienced remote workers. This system, supported by Donut, provided guidance, empathy, and tips for remote work success. Employee sentiment polls, managed through Donut, provided insights into team well-being and flagged areas for improvement.

By implementing Donut, CareMessage achieved the following outcomes:

- **Improved employee satisfaction:** Regular communication and the buddy system alleviated feelings of isolation, creating a strong sense of support among employees.
- **Seamless workflow transition:** Gradual implementation and consistent feedback loops ensured a smooth adaptation to remote workflows.
- **Stronger team connections:** Donut's tools enabled employees to maintain meaningful relationships and collaborate effectively despite physical distances.

CareMessage's strategic use of Donut transformed its transition to a fully remote workforce. By fostering belonging, enabling effective communication, and embracing flexibility, CareMessage ensured its employees thrived in a remote setting while maintaining its mission to deliver impactful healthcare communication solutions.

See more: ['How CareMessage Went 100% Remote \(And Embraced It\)'](#)

The Family Hub: A Digital Front Door

By Halton Borough Council and Beebot AI Ltd.

Halton Borough Council is working to improve access **to family services through the implementation of a Digital Front Door**. Partnering with Beebot AI and funded by the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care, this initiative seeks to enhance service delivery, streamline processes, and provide personalised, accessible support for families. Currently in its implementation stage, the Family Hub platform is being embedded across the council to revolutionise how families interact with services.

The Family Hub is an interactive application accessible via desktop and mobile, providing 24/7 access to children's and family services. Designed to address the limitations of traditional service hours, the platform offers a **variety of features:**

- **AI-driven chatbots:** Answers common questions and provide guidance on a range of topics.
- **Automated scheduling:** Simplifies appointment booking, allowing staff to focus on more complex tasks.
- **Personalised support:** Users can receive tailored push notifications, such as updates on pregnancy stages or children's immunisations, with links to additional information and services.
- **Detailed analytics:** Offers the council insights into user behaviour, enabling data-driven decision-making and iterative improvements to the platform.
- **Live chat:** Provides a direct line to council officers for further assistance.

A strong governance structure has been key to the platform's development. A monthly steering group has guided the project, ensuring alignment with strategic goals and addressing initial concerns about AI integration. Regular digital working groups, involving key experts and stakeholders, have facilitated discussions on content development

and future plans. Additionally, a weekly digital projects group works with Beebot AI to maintain momentum and address implementation challenges.

Collaboration with other North West councils has further supported the initiative, allowing Halton to share best practices and tackle common challenges. These partnerships aim to enhance accessibility and expand the platform's reach across the region.

User safety and accessibility have been central to the Family Hub's design. Measures are in place to minimise digital footprints, safeguarding vulnerable users such as domestic abuse victims. Search results within the app are restricted to verified information to ensure reliability and accuracy. Halton is also committed to inclusivity, with features under development to support Deaf users, including sign language accessibility.

The rollout of the Family Hub followed a two-pronged approach:

1 Professional engagement:

A launch event in July 2024 attracted 140 professionals, providing training on the platform's features and benefits. This event was instrumental in embedding the technology into standard practices.

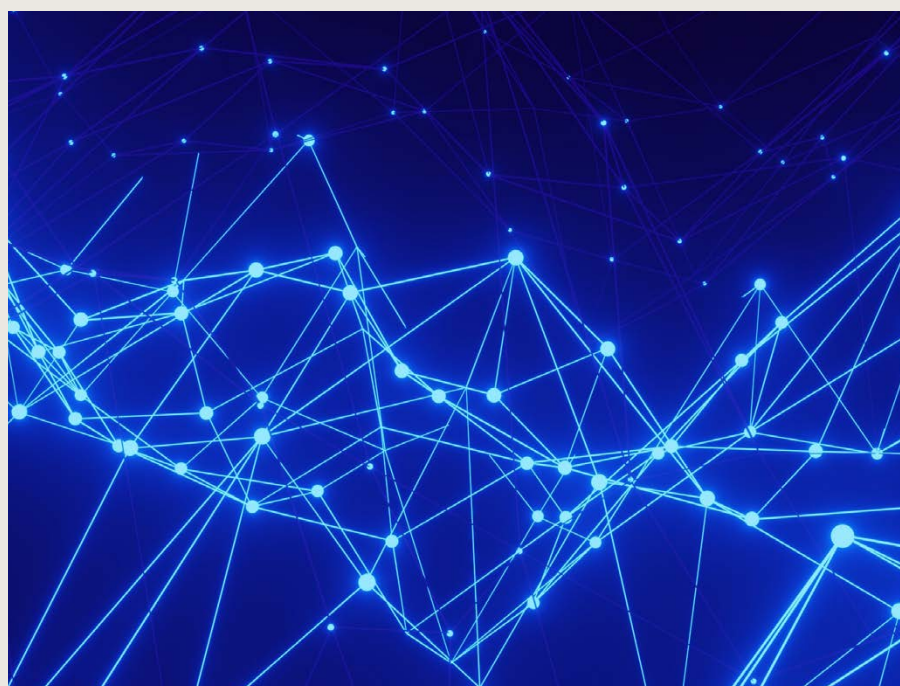
2 Public awareness campaign:

Social media campaigns and digital animations were used to educate families about the platform, highlighting its features and encouraging adoption.

The engagement phase, currently underway, focuses on increasing app usage among residents. By collaborating with internal staff, partners, and families, Halton is optimising the platform's effectiveness and reach.

The Family Hub aims to create a single digital front door for all family services, increasing accessibility and efficiency while reducing administrative burdens. By providing a digital alternative to in-person interactions, the platform empowers families to access support on their own terms. Groups that may have been underserved by traditional services, such as fathers, now have a dedicated resource to engage with family services.

Halton's long-term vision includes expanding AI capabilities within the Family Hub and exploring new opportunities for AI integration across children's services. This commitment to digital transformation positions the council as a leader in delivering accessible and efficient family services.





Transforming the Front Door

By [Public Digital Holdings Ltd.](#)

Public Digital, a global consultancy specialising in digital transformation, has partnered with local authorities to redesign the 'Front Door' of children's social care. Combining user-centred design, evidence-based practices, and advanced training, the initiative aims to improve the referral process, enhance partnerships, and deliver better outcomes for children and families. By streamlining workflows and embedding conversational approaches, the project has reduced referrals, lowered social work caseloads, and improved service quality across participating local authorities.

The 'Front Door'—the point at which children's services receive and respond to referrals—is critical to ensuring families receive timely and appropriate support. However, **many local authorities face challenges such as:**

- Overwhelming referral volumes leading to inefficiencies.
- Poor communication between social workers and partner agencies.
- Inconsistent application of thresholds, affecting decision-making and outcomes.

In response to these challenges, Public Digital implemented the 'Transforming the Front Door' approach in collaboration with Professor David Thorpe, whose model is backed by over 25 years of research. The program was designed to improve decision-making, reduce unnecessary referrals, and create a proactive, family-focused system.

The 'Transforming the Front Door' approach includes:

- **Ethnographic research:** Conducting user research with social workers to understand existing processes and challenges.
- **Redesigning processes:** Simplifying referral pathways to ensure families receive the right help at the right time.
- **Training and coaching:** Equipping social workers with conversational techniques and partnership-building skills.
- **Data analysis:** Monitoring the impact of changes through rigorous evaluation and ensuring consistent delivery.

This 12-month program integrates service design, training, and data-driven insights to embed sustainable changes. It draws on Professor Thorpe's research, which has demonstrated reductions in referrals, social work caseloads, and statutory interventions.

The project has delivered significant improvements in all participating local authorities:

Improved quality of referrals

- Partners gained clarity on thresholds and service responses, leading to more appropriate and targeted interventions.
- A reduction in referrals by 25-35% was observed, with more families supported through Early Help services.

Enhanced partnerships

- Direct conversations replaced written referrals, improving mutual understanding and saving partners' time.
- Proactive collaboration reduced the need for follow-ups and clarified actions.

Reduced social work caseloads

- Social worker caseloads fell by 20-30%, allowing greater focus on proactive work.
- In Leeds, caseloads dropped from 25 to 18 per social worker, significantly improving capacity.

Better outcomes for children and families

- Lower caseloads and improved focus led to reductions in statutory interventions, including child protection plans and children entering care.
- Ofsted inspections validated the safety and effectiveness of the new arrangements, with improved ratings for participating councils.

Sustainable change

By embedding conversational approaches and collaborative practices, the initiative established a model that can be scaled and sustained across other authorities.

See more: 'How Transforming the Front Door has positively impacted the four local authorities where I implemented it'

My Best Life

By [Mind Of My Own Ltd.](#)

Featured in last year's Collective, Mind Of My Own builds social impact software that connects children and families to services and helps them to thrive. Their latest project, My Best Life, is **a digital solution to the one-stop shop**. The accessible software was co-produced with NPC, Sunderland City Council, Together for Children and Salford City Council, and co-designed with adults and young people using services.

It enables children and families to tailor content precisely to their needs, pointing them to relevant support services in their area and offering essential information. A true digital family hub, My Best Life signposts to all children and families' services from one place, with the ability to display local offers, housing, health and wellbeing services and many more.



Who is it for?

- End-to-end solution for Digital Family Hubs, SEND and Care Leaver Core offer and Family Information Services (FIS) directory, with Ofsted Feed Integration
- Councils looking for a reliable and up-to-date, user-friendly directory of their local services and activities.
- Service providers that need to promote what they do to everyone in the locality and ensure no one is overlooked.
- Children and families who are seeking support, services or activities that are suited specifically to them and their needs.

Key features include:

- Fully accessible and available in over 100 languages.
- Ofsted integration.
- One-stop shop for signposting all events and activities, useful information and guidance, and service directories.
- Online booking service, with features including filtering, invitation to review, rate an event, ask questions, make payment and share on social media.

Key benefits include:

- One single directory for all services.
- Ability to engage with hard-to-reach

families through the accessible features of the website.

- User-centric design tailored for ease of use.
- One uniform way of presenting the range of local services to children and families, with features to track interest, usage and outcomes.
- Well-designed admin process, making it easy and quick for providers to upload their own events and details.
- Provides data-driven insights to continuously improve services based on honest user feedback and engagement patterns.

See more: <https://mindofmyown.org.uk/my-best-life/> <https://www.mybestlife.org.uk/Sunderland-Family-Hubs>

"My Best Life has helped us share our local services with the families and children that need them most. It is a brilliant way to have all our support resources in one place-easy for families and young people and for the local authority too."

Melissa McArthur, Lead Commissioner of Children's Services, Lambeth Council

SMART Children's Services Copilot

By [ICS.AI Ltd.](#)

The SMART Children's Services Copilot is **a tool designed to transform the delivery of children's services by providing timely responses and essential updates to families**. Leveraging advanced AI technology, the Copilot ensures families receive swift, efficient support, enhancing their peace of mind and engagement with child welfare systems. Its tailored approach keeps families informed and connected, fostering transparency and trust in the services they rely on.

Simultaneously, the Copilot serves as a vital resource for staff, streamlining workflows and automating routine tasks. By utilising AI for critical insights, social workers can redirect their time and focus to complex cases and deliver specialised care where it is most needed. This dual-purpose tool not only elevates service delivery for families but also enhances staff efficiency and job satisfaction, potentially yielding significant time and cost savings of 5-20%.

By creating a more responsive, efficient, and focused service environment, the SMART Children's Services Copilot is paving the way for the modernisation of children's services.

Features include:

- Streamlined case management, assessments and planning, powered by generative AI
- 24/7 self-service digital engagement across channels and devices
- Accessible, customisable and intuitive user design
- Intent analytics anonymously captures and analyses user interactions
- Multichannel communication enhances service accessibility
- Automated workflows reduce time spent on administrative tasks
- Push notifications for instant carer and clinical updates
- Multi-language support for accessible, inclusive service delivery
- Generative AI triage directs safeguarding and urgent queries effectively

Key benefits include:

- Reduce service delivery and contact costs up to 60%
- Improves care worker efficiency and self-service capabilities
- Rapid deployment with minimal need for additional training
- Enhances decision-making with data-driven insights
- Increases child and family safety with prompt alert responses
- Facilitates focused support on high-need cases
- Keeps families well-informed, improving trust and transparency
- Empowers families with self-service tools and information
- GDPR compliant, ensuring ethical use and data security
- Multi-turn user experience provides details, supportive interactions for complex scenarios

CASE STUDY: TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

Telford & Wrekin Council, located in semi-rural Shropshire, serves a diverse population of 180,000 residents across various towns and villages. Like many councils, Telford faced the challenge of managing a high volume of resident inquiries through traditional channels such as phone, email, and live chat, which strained resources and impacted efficiency. To address this, the council partnered with ICS.AI to develop a custom-built AI assistant, 'Ask Tom,' revolutionising service delivery and transforming the resident experience.

The council needed a solution to:

- Reduce high call volumes and associated waiting times.
- Shift resident engagement towards digital channels while ensuring accessibility.
- Free up staff to handle complex cases by automating responses to routine inquiries.
- Deliver improved customer satisfaction and operational efficiency.

'Ask Tom,' powered by ICS.AI's SMART AI Platform, was introduced as a digital AI assistant to provide 24/7 support to residents.

Key features of 'Ask Tom' include:

- Covering over 1,000 council-related topics, 'Ask Tom' provides accurate answers to a wide range of resident queries.

- The assistant is trained to respond with accuracy comparable to human advisors on the first attempt
- Leveraging ICS.AI's SMART Mesh technology, 'Ask Tom' improves over time by learning from other AI assistants in the network.

Since its launch, 'Ask Tom' has demonstrated impressive results:

- Enhanced customer satisfaction: Achieved a 99.3% satisfaction rate compared to 91.2% for traditional service channels.
- Operational savings: 32% of queries were handled outside traditional working hours, reducing staff workload.
- Efficiency gains:
 - 69% reduction in live chat requests for council tax inquiries.
 - 35% drop in call volumes.
 - 60% reduction in live chat volumes overall.
 - 16.5% decrease in average waiting times across services.
- New service delivery: Freed-up resources allowed the council to introduce three additional service areas—homelessness, registration services, and libraries—benefiting 4,000 monthly calls without increasing headcount.

'Ask Tom' has been instrumental in driving a channel shift towards digital engagement:

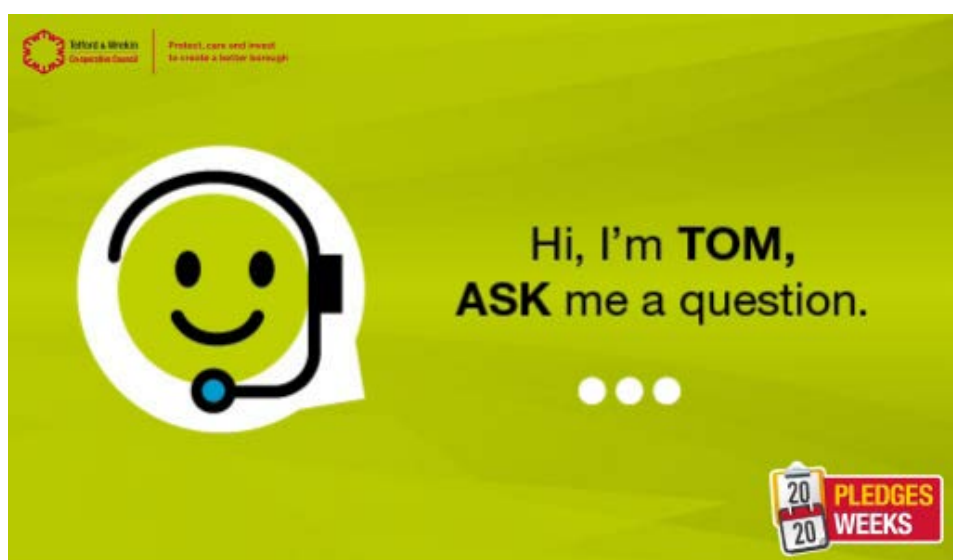
- Encouraged residents to use digital platforms as their primary point of contact, significantly reducing reliance on phone-based interactions.
- Integrated seamlessly into the council's MyTelford phone app, providing residents with a convenient digital hub for accessing services.
- Identified unmet needs, such as challenges with council tax payments, enabling the council to provide timely assistance.

Telford & Wrekin Council's adoption of AI has set a benchmark for excellence in public service innovation:

- Winner of the 2023 APSE Award for Best Efficiency and Transformation Initiative.
- Named Local Authority of the Year at the MJ Achievement Awards in 2022.

By leveraging AI, the council has not only improved operational efficiency but also enhanced the quality and accessibility of its services, ensuring better outcomes for residents.

Building on the success of 'Ask Tom,' Telford & Wrekin Council is exploring additional AI use cases, including voice AI integration and generative AI technologies. These advancements will further position the council as a leader in digital transformation, inspiring other local authorities to embrace the potential of AI in delivering smarter, more effective public services.



MyLifePlan

By Lumin Solutions Ltd.

Lumin Solutions, a team of dedicated social care professionals and technology creators, has developed the Digital Care Assistant (DCA) to transform the way care is managed and delivered for looked-after children. **This platform leverages AI and digital tools to streamline case management processes, empowering children to actively participate in their care and support while enhancing efficiency for social workers and care providers.**

The Digital Care Assistant is specifically designed to give looked-after children a voice in their care. Acting as a memory book, the platform ensures that every significant moment in a child's life is recorded in a meaningful and child-centred way. By fostering ownership and inclusion, the DCA allows children to engage with their support plans, make informed decisions, and take control of their future.

Unlike generic case management systems, the DCA has been purpose-built for children's social care.

Empowerment and ownership: Children have constant insight and inclusion in decision-making and support planning, ensuring they feel heard and valued.

Streamlined workflow for support workers: Designed in collaboration with care providers, the system minimises administrative burdens, allowing workers to dedicate more time to direct care.

Advanced AI and Machine Learning: These technologies enable accurate data analysis and automated tasks, enhancing digital care planning and supporting managers with administrative efficiency.

Affordability and accessibility: Positioned as the first affordable, accessible case management system tailored to children's care, it offers significant cost benefits to organisations.

The Digital Care Assistant strives to be child-centric. Every feature is built to support children directly, prioritising their voice and well-being over operational logistics. Lumin Solutions has redefined the concept of case management by delivering a system focused entirely on person-centred support.

Key benefits include:

Enhanced quality of care: By freeing up time previously spent on administration, support workers can focus on providing meaningful care.

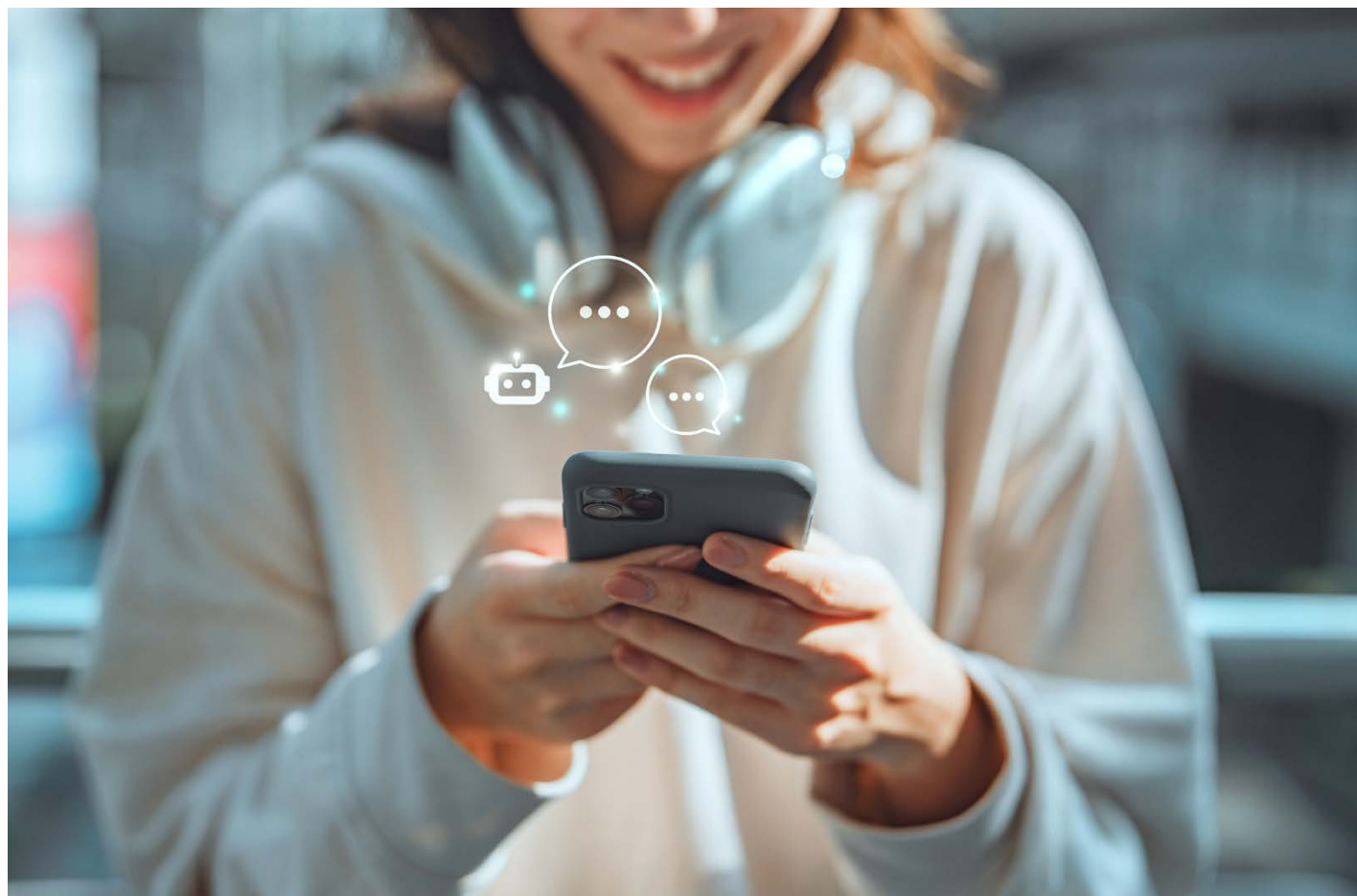
Regulatory compliance: Easily evidences compliance with evolving regulations, ensuring care meets the highest standards.

Robust security: Ensures consistent and accurate recording of sensitive information, stored securely.

User-friendly design: Navigation is 60% faster compared to the next best software, improving efficiency and reducing frustration.

The Digital Care Assistant is working to revolutionise child social care by prioritising the needs and voices of children in care while empowering support workers with tools to enhance their efficiency and effectiveness. Through a commitment to person-centred design, Lumin Solutions is not just improving case management but fundamentally redefining the way care is planned, delivered, and recorded.

Core features include:



The UK Centre for AI in the Public Sector

By Newham Council and the University of East London



Newham Council has partnered with the University of East London (UEL), a leader in AI research, to establish the UK Centre for AI in the Public Sector. This collaborative venture aims to harness the transformative power of AI to address complex challenges in local government, driving innovation and improving services for the community.

By focusing on real-world applications, the centre seeks to inspire other councils to adopt AI solutions tailored to public sector needs.

Launched in September 2024, the UK Centre for AI in the Public Sector focuses on leveraging AI to enhance critical service areas, including social housing,

temporary accommodation, social care, repairs and maintenance, the local economy, and climate change mitigation. The centre represents a strategic effort to integrate cutting-edge technology with public services, ensuring ethical, effective, and impactful use of AI.

Key objectives include:

- To promote the use of AI in improving services in areas such as temporary accommodation, local economy, social care, and climate change mitigation.
- To ensure ethical and effective use of AI through robust governance and compliance frameworks.
- To contribute significantly to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in areas such as Arts and Culture, Young People, Sustainability, Health Inequalities, Economic Inequalities, and Data Economy or Cybersecurity.

Newham faces significant challenges in managing temporary housing, with annual expenditures exceeding £20 million—one of the highest in the UK. This partnership aims to address this pressing issue through AI-driven solutions:

- **Predictive models:** Developing tools to forecast housing demand and

homelessness trends.

- **Streamlined processes:** Exploring AI systems to optimise the procurement and allocation of temporary accommodation properties.

Building on the Newham Data Analytics Framework (NDAF), the partnership will integrate data from diverse sources to generate actionable insights. These efforts will also extend to research in health and education, ensuring a comprehensive approach to improving public services.

The centre places a strong emphasis on engaging the local community and fostering collaboration across disciplines. Training programs will equip public sector staff and residents with the skills needed to utilise AI effectively. This commitment to inclusivity ensures that the benefits of AI are accessible to all.

A steering committee comprising representatives from Newham Council, UEL, and the London Office of Innovation and Technology (LOTI) will guide the

initiative. An advisory board of experts from academia, industry, and the public sector will provide strategic oversight, ensuring that research findings are applicable to broader local government contexts. Ethical considerations remain a priority, with governance frameworks designed to align with the Sustainable Development Goals.

The immediate priorities include:

- **Stakeholder engagement:** Collaborating with key stakeholders to refine objectives and gather feedback.
- **Securing funding:** Establishing financial support to sustain the centre's operations.
- **Pilot projects:** Launching initiatives in priority areas to demonstrate the potential of AI-driven solutions.
- **Training programs:** Equipping public sector employees with the knowledge and skills to integrate AI into their work effectively.

Simply Readable, an AI easy-read solution

By [Swindon Borough Council](#)

Swindon Borough Council has introduced **an AI-driven tool, Simply Readable, to create accessible “Easy Read” documents**. This solution significantly simplifies complex information, making it understandable for individuals with learning disabilities, while also benefiting people with low literacy levels, cognitive impairments, or English as a second language. Leveraging the power of AI, Simply Readable is transforming the way councils provide equitable access to critical information.

Creating Easy Read documents traditionally required significant time and financial resources, making the process unsustainable. For example, converting a 5-10 page document into an Easy Read format could cost upwards of £600. Social workers spent hours or even weeks on this process, diverting valuable time away from direct community support. Recognising the need for an efficient and cost-effective solution, Swindon Borough Council developed Simply Readable to address these challenges.

Simply Readable was co-created with input from local residents with learning disabilities, including the ‘Experts by Experience of a Learning Disability’ focus group. This collaborative approach ensured the tool met the specific needs and preferences of its target audience.

The platform uses:

- **Anthropic’s ‘Claude 2’:** Analyses and summarises complex documents into short, jargon-free sentences.
- **Stability AI’s ‘Stable Diffusion’:** Generates clear and relevant images to accompany the simplified text.

This combination allows Simply Readable to create Easy Read documents quickly, at an average cost of just 7-10 pence per page—a fraction of the previous costs.

Key features and benefits include:

Rapid document creation: Easy Read documents can now be produced in under 30 minutes, freeing up social workers to focus on providing direct support.

Cost-effective: Reduces the cost of creating Easy Read documents from £120 per page to less than 10 pence per page, delivering significant financial savings.

Global accessibility: The platform supports translation into 75 languages, extending its reach to millions worldwide.

Cloud-based and user-friendly: Requires minimal technical expertise and no per-user licensing fees, making it accessible and scalable.

Empowering communities: Provides individuals with learning disabilities greater independence by making critical information clear and comprehensible.

The deployment of Simply Readable has delivered measurable outcomes:

- Staff now take an average of 15 minutes to create Easy Read documents, compared to hours or weeks previously.
- Individuals with learning disabilities or language barriers now have improved access to essential information.
- Savings achieved through reduced document creation costs can be reinvested into other vital social services.

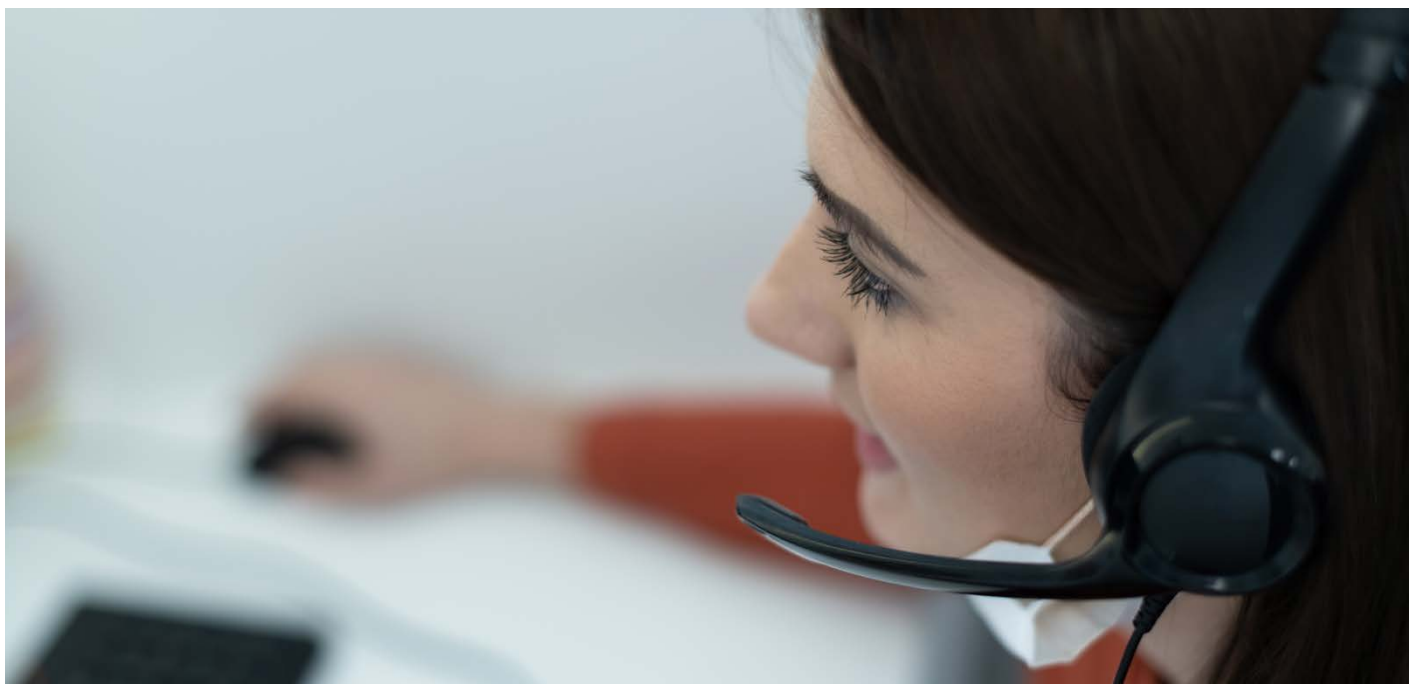
Building on the success of Simply Readable, Swindon Borough Council is exploring additional AI solutions to further enhance adult social care services. This includes using AI to record, transcribe, and document conversations, such as Care Act and Mental Capacity Assessments, ensuring accurate and efficient communication.

See more: [‘Council using AI to help people with learning disabilities’](#)



“The [Innovation Leadership] course was extremely well delivered and gives tangible resources to use but also openly supports a culture of innovation which is very positive and purposeful.”

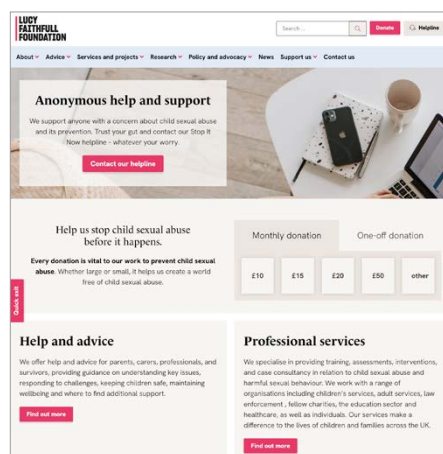




Shore website

By the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, a registered charity

Shore is a dedicated online platform designed to provide a safe and confidential space for teenagers aged 13-18 who are worried about sexual thoughts or behaviours, whether their own or someone else's. Created by The Lucy Faithfull Foundation, a charity committed to preventing child sexual abuse, Shore launched in 2023 to tackle the stigma and challenges young people face when addressing concerns about sexual behaviour. Its mission is to provide accurate information, support, and resources to help prevent harmful behaviours and foster healthier relationships among young people.



Shore is tailored to meet the unique needs of young people who:

- have questions about healthy sexual relationships
- want to change their own behaviour
- are looking for reliable information to help them respond to someone else's behaviour

Recognising the stigma and shame often attached to these topics, Shore offers a judgement-free and anonymous environment. This website was co-created with young people to ensure its content resonates with their needs and experiences.

Shore provides straightforward, evidence-based advice on managing sexual thoughts and behaviours, alongside a confidential chat and email service where teenagers can seek guidance from trained advisors.

Since its launch, Shore has achieved remarkable success:

- Over 37,000 users visited the website between September 2023 and September 2024.
- The chat and email services have supported 191 young people, responding to 232 chat sessions and 151 emails.
- For 72% of chat and email users, Shore was the first place they felt comfortable discussing their concerns.

"Shore is a sanctuary, a safe place where they can talk to someone about what they are going through, openly and without judgement," says Ida, one of the advisors on the Shore chat service.

Through empathetic listening and expert guidance, Shore helps young people take positive steps to improve their mental health, change their behaviour, and protect themselves and others.

"We do what we can to support children and young people to make positive changes in their lives, to improve their mental health, and receive advice and support—all in the name of child protection," Ida adds.

In October 2024, Shore expanded its chat service by adding an additional evening each week to increase accessibility for young people seeking support.

Looking ahead, Shore aims to:

- Publish findings from an ongoing external evaluation.
- Continuously update and expand the platform's content to address the most relevant and pressing topics for teenagers.

See more: [Shore's website](#)

Use of generative AI tools

By [West Berkshire Council](#)

West Berkshire Council has embraced generative AI, **developing custom in-house tools tailored to meet their unique needs.** By leveraging existing expertise within the council and using openly available large language models, they have crafted cost-effective and flexible solutions that integrate seamlessly with their workflows and data infrastructure. This approach ensures that the council retains control over its systems while addressing specific challenges.

The council initially focused on automating the creation of job advertisements and LinkedIn posts to accelerate recruitment processes. Using OpenAI's GPT models, a prototype was developed to generate content based on predefined inputs such as job titles, salaries, and reporting lines. The system collects this data through an integrated digital platform and feeds it into the AI model to produce complete job adverts. Feedback from senior managers rated the AI-generated content highly, averaging 8 out of 10 in satisfaction.

Building on this success, the council began exploring additional applications of generative AI, including the creation of bespoke AI 'assistants'. These assistants are trained with specific documents and prompts to address targeted needs. Examples include chatbots designed to answer frequently asked recycling questions and internal policy assistants aimed at helping employees quickly access accurate policy information.

8 OUT OF 10

FEEDBACK FROM SENIOR MANAGERS RATED THE AI-GENERATED CONTENT HIGHLY, AVERAGING 8 OUT OF 10 IN SATISFACTION.



During the initial stages, the council encountered reliability issues with ChatGPT and raised concerns about data privacy and OpenAI's data usage practices. Additionally, the recycling chatbot sometimes provided incorrect information due to limitations in its knowledge base.

To overcome these challenges, the council adopted OpenAI's secure APIs, which offer improved data protection and reliability. Publicly available data, such as existing job advertisements, was used to minimise privacy risks. AI models were fine-tuned with specific training data to improve accuracy and ensure consistency in outputs. Legal compliance was ensured through data privacy impact assessments and rigorous checks.

Collaboration and inclusivity were key to the project's success. Recruiting managers were actively involved in testing and refining the AI-generated job adverts, ensuring they met the council's standards and requirements. This inclusive approach reinforced trust in the system and demonstrated the council's commitment to ethical AI implementation.

The implementation of generative AI has delivered tangible benefits for West Berkshire Council:

Efficiency gains: Managers reported significant time savings in drafting job postings. The automation ensures that all essential information is included, resulting in consistently formatted adverts.

Cost-effectiveness: The initial setup cost was approximately £300 in staff

time, with ongoing operational costs as low as £2 per month. This demonstrates that custom AI solutions can be far more affordable than commercial alternatives.

Improved accessibility: Internal policy assistants simplify access to information, enhancing communication and efficiency within the council.

Scalability: The council's ability to train AI assistants for diverse purposes highlights the adaptability of their approach.

West Berkshire Council is committed to expanding its generative AI initiatives.

Planned developments include:

- Creating additional AI tools to streamline processes across a wider range of services.
- Expanding the internal policy assistant chatbot to cover more areas, providing employees with greater support.
- Exploring commercial AI products like Microsoft's Copilot and Amazon Bedrock to complement their in-house tools.
- Establishing a dedicated AI Governance Board comprising representatives from key departments, including ICT, legal, and frontline services, to oversee ethical AI deployment and ensure alignment with organisational goals.

See more: ['Using AI to improve local services – with people always in control'](#)

The Children's Information Project

By the Rees Centre at Oxford University, University of Sussex, London School of Economics and Political Science, University College London, Manchester Metropolitan University and Research in Practice

The 'Children's Information' project is **an initiative aimed at transforming how data about children and families involved with children's services is collected, interpreted, and used.**

Supported by the [Nuffield Foundation](#), this collaboration involves multiple local authorities, universities, and research organisations working together to create a more ethical and effective approach to handling children's information. By amplifying the voices of children, families, and practitioners, the project aspires to deliver better outcomes, reduce inequalities, and enhance cost-effectiveness in local and national children's services.

Despite the wealth of information gathered about children and families, much of it remains underutilised or poorly integrated, resulting in missed opportunities to tailor services to their needs.

This project seeks to:

- Ensure that children's voices and diverse experiences are central to how information is collected, shared, and applied.
- Build an ethical framework for the responsible use of data and qualitative insights.
- Reduce inequalities and improve outcomes by informing local authority policies and practices with robust, context-specific information.

This project unites:

- Two County Councils ([North Yorkshire](#) and [Hampshire](#)).
- Two Borough Councils ([Oldham](#) and [Rochdale](#)), collaborating with the [Greater Manchester Combined Authority](#).
- Five leading universities.
- [Research in Practice](#), a key partner supporting the Learning Network.

Each participating local authority focuses on specific service areas:

- **Hampshire:** Enhancing early help for children and families needing additional support.
- **North Yorkshire:** Supporting young people transitioning out of care.
- **Oldham:** Targeting communication, speech, and language development in early years services.
- **Rochdale:** Strengthening the role of Family Hubs in supporting universal and targeted services.

The project explores five interrelated themes to shape its approach:

Data: Integrating statistical data across agencies to provide a comprehensive view of children and families over time while considering financial implications.

Voice: Ensuring meaningful engagement with children, families, and practitioners to complement statistical insights with qualitative perspectives.

Ethics: Establishing ethical guidelines that promote the rights and dignity of children and families.

Use: Applying data and voices to inform policies and practices, with an emphasis on including diverse perspectives.

Learning: Developing tools and frameworks that support continuous improvement in the use of information.

Local sites work closely with researchers to:

- Assess how data and qualitative insights are currently utilised.
- Identify opportunities to improve data integration and application.
- Involve children, families, and practitioners in shaping how information is used to influence decision-making.

In addition to the five local sites, a Learning Network comprising 20 other local authorities will engage with the project. This network will test and refine the project's findings, contributing their insights to co-produce practical guides and resources.

The project aims to:

- Equip local authorities with the tools to address inequalities and improve service outcomes.
- Provide actionable insights into how information can be used more effectively and ethically.
- Foster a collaborative culture among children, families, and practitioners to co-create better services.
- Influence local and national policies through shared learning, events, and an interactive project website.

See more: [Children's Information](#).

EQUIP LOCAL
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PROVIDE ACTIONABLE
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EFFECTIVELY AND
ETHICALLY.



FOSTER A COLLABORATIVE
CULTURE AMONG
CHILDREN, FAMILIES,
AND PRACTITIONERS
TO CO-CREATE
BETTER SERVICES.

Chapter 2

Cultural competence, diversity and inclusion

Ensuring that children's services effectively support diverse communities requires a deep commitment to cultural competence, anti-racism, and inclusion. This chapter explores initiatives that equip practitioners with the skills, knowledge, and frameworks to engage meaningfully with children, young people, and families from different cultural backgrounds while embedding these practices into policy and service delivery.

Collectively, the initiatives in this chapter demonstrate the increasing commitment of children's services to equity and inclusion. By striving for cultural competence, diversity and inclusion, service providers can create environments that genuinely celebrate diversity while ensuring equitable outcomes for all children and families.



- 24 Anti-racist framework for decision-making and transitioning children from minoritised racial and ethnic groups into transracial adoptive families (AFDiT)
- 25 Children's Services Tackling Structural Racism Action Group
- 25 Strengths-based, relational practice with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities
- 26 Anti-Racist Practice Strategy
- 27 Don't Stand By, Step In
- 28 Violence against Women and Girls Prevention Pilot
- 29 Family Harmony Toolkit
- 30 AI tools to support co-parent communication

Anti-racist framework for decision-making and transitioning children from minoritised racial and ethnic groups into transracial adoptive families (AFDiT)

By Cane, T., Puhan, S., Ruch, G., & Wilson, M.

The Anti-Racist Framework for Decision-Making and Transitioning Children from Minoritised Racial and Ethnic Groups into Transracial Adoptive Families (AFDiT) is an initiative developed to address the complex identity needs of racialised and minoritised ethnic children in transracial adoption settings.

Often referred to as 'supporting children's identity in permanence,' AFDiT was founded by Dr. Tam Cane and her research team at the University of Sussex. This framework is the product of extensive collaboration with social work practitioners, individuals with lived experiences of transracial adoption, and key partners such as Adoption South East and CoramBAAF. The project received funding from the British Academy and Adoption England.

AFDiT aims to guide social workers in understanding, protecting, and addressing the identity needs of minoritised ethnic children transitioning into transracial adoptive families. While the framework is specifically designed for adoption processes, its relevance extends to anyone working with children living away from their birth parents.

By embedding AFDiT into practice, social workers, teams, adoption panels, and families can navigate issues of identity and cultural preservation with greater sensitivity and expertise.

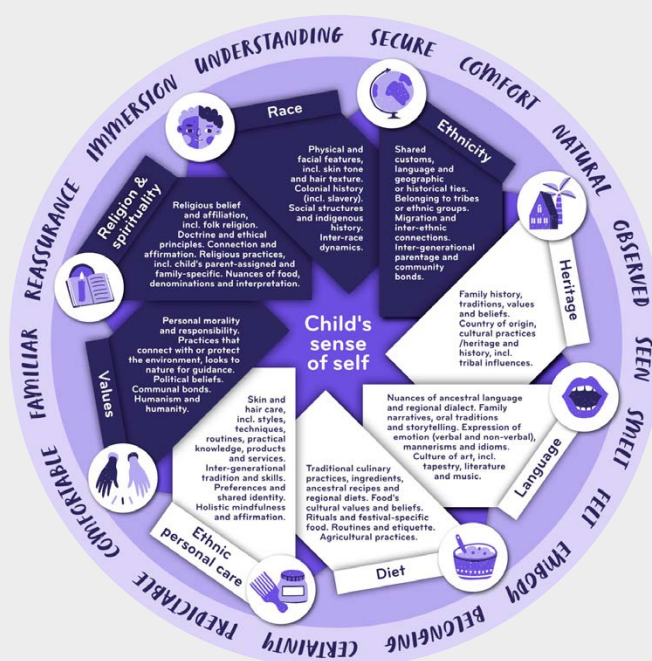
AFDiT's utility spans every stage of the adoption journey, from early permanence planning to the assessment and support of adopters and families.

The framework provides a structured approach to:

- Permanency planning.
- Writing Child Permanence Reports.
- Assessing cultural and ethnic needs.
- Supporting families through the adoption process.

By tailoring decision-making to the unique needs of minoritised children, AFDiT ensures that their cultural and racial identities are acknowledged, respected, and celebrated. The framework's overarching goal is to mitigate trauma, particularly epistemic trauma, often associated with transracial adoption, and to foster environments where children's identities can thrive.

The adoption of AFDiT across England highlights its growing significance as a national framework. To date, approximately 53 champions, comprising Regional Adoption Services and members of the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies, have been trained to implement and advocate for AFDiT. These champions include 43 trained during the framework's launch and 12 co-creators who contributed directly to its development, alongside experts by experience.



AFDiT has proven to be a vital tool for:

- Improving assessments and decision-making around identity and cultural needs.
- Guiding support requirements for minoritised children and their adoptive families.
- Encouraging practices that celebrate, rather than overlook, children's racial and cultural identities.

The vision for AFDiT's future is one of widespread cultural and racial justice within the adoption system. The framework aspires to create a landscape where transracial adoption no longer results in trauma but instead becomes a nurturing process that honours every child's identity and humanity. By equipping professionals with the tools and knowledge to address cultural and racial needs effectively, AFDiT sets the stage for meaningful change.

With ongoing commitment and energy, the AFDiT framework stands as a national standard for transracial adoption practices. Its champions and supporters are paving the way for a future where every adopted child feels valued, understood, and celebrated for who they are.

See more: [The Framework](#)

Children's Services Tackling Structural Racism Action Group

By the [Royal Borough of Greenwich](#)

The Royal Borough of Greenwich (RBG) has taken proactive steps to address structural racism within its Children's Services through the establishment of the Tackling Structural Racism (TSR) Action Group. This group, alongside targeted initiatives, aims to challenge systemic inequalities, promote inclusivity, and ensure equitable opportunities and outcomes for children, families, and staff.

In October 2020, RBG launched its **Equality and Equity Action Plan**, a comprehensive roadmap designed to achieve the borough's Equality Objectives (2020-2024). This plan calls for the active involvement of all staff in addressing disproportionality and creating a culture of inclusivity. The initiative arose from a recognition of the deep-rooted impact of structural racism and the need for sustained, meaningful

change within the organisation.

At the heart of this transformation is the Children's Services Tackling Structural Racism (TSR) Action Group, a team of dedicated volunteers committed to identifying and addressing the root causes of racial inequalities. By fostering open dialogue, sharing lived experiences, and developing actionable solutions, the group works to dismantle barriers that perpetuate disparities in the system.

The TSR Action Group engages in a **range of activities to challenge systemic racism, including:**

- Delivering anti-racist training to build awareness and equip staff with tools to identify and combat bias.
- Encouraging the sharing of lived experiences to deepen understanding of racism's impact within the workplace and community.
- Promoting diversity in recruitment and career progression, ensuring that leadership and decision-making structures reflect the diverse community RBG serves.

"I'm very proud of Greenwich Children Services for being honest about where we are at and being passionately proactive in working towards changing that. I get so much of my strength and drive by volunteering alongside colleagues who always have a listening ear and give so freely for what they believe in."

- Shalini Abrol, Children's Principal Social Worker, Service Leader - Workforce Development.



Strengths-based, relational practice with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities

By [Durham County Council](#)

Durham County Council has implemented a **strengths-based, relational practice framework to support Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) communities**. This approach emphasises cultural competence, sensitivity, and building trust through respectful engagement and multi-agency collaboration.

One of the significant challenges has been addressing the underreporting of issues and mistrust of services among GRT communities, which has often acted as a barrier to accessing support. High levels of poverty, social exclusion, and disrupted schooling have had a detrimental impact on GRT children, compounding the challenges faced by these communities. Negative stereotypes, hate crimes, and anti-GRT narratives in the media have further strained community relations, highlighting the importance of

culturally sensitive and inclusive practices. Additionally, there is a continuous need for cultural competence training to equip practitioners with the skills and understanding necessary to provide effective and empathetic support.

The project aims to provide culturally competent and sensitive services tailored to the unique needs of GRT communities. By focusing on assertive and respectful engagement, the initiative seeks to build trust and meaningful relationships with GRT families. Improving social, educational, and health outcomes for GRT children and families is a central objective, supported by fostering a learning culture and promoting GRT cultural awareness among practitioners and the wider community.

Key achievements so far include:

- Established a trauma-aware practice framework for children, young people, and families.
- Conducted GRT cultural awareness workshops for newly qualified social workers and multi-agency partners.
- Developed specialist teams in

housing, education, and health to support GRT communities.

- Implemented GRT safeguarding meetings and cultural awareness workshops for teachers and school children.
- Provided library resources to ensure GRT children feel seen and valued.
- Promoted leadership development opportunities for staff from diverse backgrounds.

Key learning includes:

- Building trust and relationships with GRT communities requires consistent, respectful engagement and cultural competence.
- Multi-agency collaboration and information sharing are crucial for effective support.
- Continuous professional development and training in cultural awareness are essential for practitioners.
- Promoting diversity and inclusion within the workforce strengthens service delivery and community relations.

Anti-Racist Practice Strategy

By [Essex County Council](#)

In 2022, Essex County Council embarked on **a journey to confront racism within its organisation and services**. Initiated in response to the murder of George Floyd in 2020, the project officially kicked off in 2022 with the launch of an Anti-Racist Practice (ARP) Strategy in 2023. This strategy is part of a broader commitment to fostering equity and inclusion, aiming to create a workforce capable of addressing racism and improving outcomes for ethnically diverse children and families.

The ARP project focuses on several key goals. It seeks to guide ethnically diverse families towards early help services, ensuring their specific needs are recognised and addressed. The initiative also aims to equip the workforce with the skills and confidence to engage in open and challenging conversations about racism. Additionally, the strategy ensures that ethnicity, race, and culture are meaningfully incorporated into assessments, interventions, and care planning processes, ensuring culturally competent service delivery.

The project has already made significant strides. Directors and staff have participated in training sessions designed to build awareness and capacity around anti-racist practices. Learning spaces have been established to facilitate

ongoing dialogue and reflection among staff. Moreover, systemic changes have been implemented, such as updating ethnicity labels within internal systems to ensure they are inclusive and accurate.

Another critical focus has been amplifying the voices of ethnically diverse staff, providing opportunities for them to share experiences of racism and foster organisational learning. Efforts have also been directed at addressing the over-representation of ethnically diverse children in need, protection, and care figures, working towards equitable outcomes.

The council's efforts have extended beyond local boundaries, with active participation in regional and national anti-racist practice panels and conferences, contributing to broader conversations about equity in public services.

Despite the progress, several challenges persist:

Securing organisational buy-in:

Achieving alignment with the council's broader values and strategic priorities has been difficult. There remains a lack of urgency in some quarters regarding anti-racist efforts.

Governance clarity: The project has faced obstacles in establishing a clear governance structure for anti-racist initiatives, which has at times hindered progress.

Resource constraints: Securing adequate resources to sustain anti-racist work remains a pressing challenge, with limited funding and ongoing financial constraints posing barriers to achieving long-term goals.

The Essex County Council ARP project has yielded important lessons:

Formalising anti-racist policies: A dedicated Anti-Racism Policy is critical for ensuring clarity, consistency, and accountability. This would address the current lack of coordination across teams and provide a firm foundation for progress.

Realising benefits over time: Achieving meaningful changes in attitudes and behaviours requires sustained effort. The full impact of anti-racist initiatives will only be realised through continuous engagement with children, families, and staff.

Emotional resilience: Tackling racism comes with significant emotional challenges for staff leading the agenda. Supporting these individuals with resources, mental health support, and opportunities for reflection is essential to maintain momentum and morale.

See more: [Anti-racist practice strategy](#)



Don't Stand By, Step In

By [Redbridge Council](#)

Redbridge Council has launched an **initiative aimed at addressing women's safety and tackling sexist harassment in the borough**. Named 'Don't Stand By, Step In,' the campaign calls on residents to take proactive measures when witnessing harassment. This initiative is part of the broader 'This Has To Stop' campaign, a long-term effort to end violence against women and girls (VAWG) in Redbridge.

The initiative stems from feedback indicating that many bystanders feel uncertain about how to intervene when witnessing harassment. Concerns about making the situation worse or not knowing what to do are common barriers. 'Don't Stand By, Step In' seeks to empower individuals with practical tools and guidance to effectively support women and girls, promoting safety and respect in public spaces.



Innovation is an essential ingredient for high performing services."

Adrian Loades, former Interim Chief Executive and Corporate Director of People, London Borough of Redbridge

The campaign outlines three simple, actionable steps for bystanders to follow:

- 1 Distract the Perpetrator:** Depending on the situation, bystanders can create a distraction by asking the harasser a question, such as directions, the time, or even complimenting their clothing. This subtle intervention can defuse the tension and shift focus.
- 2 Support the Victim:** Making eye contact with the affected woman or asking if she's okay can provide reassurance. If appropriate, offer to walk her to her destination or involve another passerby to assist. It's essential to respect her wishes and avoid actions that might make her feel uncomfortable.
- 3 Seek Help:** Look for others nearby who can help, such as shop staff or transport workers. In more serious situations, call the police on 999 to ensure the woman's safety.

Developed using international best practices in bystander training, 'Don't Stand By, Step In' provides resources to help residents, local businesses, and community organisations combat harassment. These tools are designed to raise awareness and equip people with the knowledge needed to address inappropriate behaviour effectively.

Redbridge Council's Leader, Councillor Jas Athwal, emphasised the importance of collective action, stating:

"Everyone deserves to feel safe on our streets. This initiative equips our community with the tools to challenge unacceptable behaviour and support victims, while reinforcing the message that harassment has no place in Redbridge."

The council is also implementing additional measures, including penalties for men who engage in catcalling, as part of its commitment to ending sexual harassment.

Recognising the critical role of men in addressing VAWG, male leaders across the borough have stepped up to champion the campaign. Dr. Stephen Addison, CEO of Box Up Crime, and community leader Taiwo Ademola are actively working with youth leaders to challenge sexist attitudes and behaviours among young people.

Dr. Addison stated,

"Sexist harassment isn't just something we have to accept. Men need to hold each other accountable and set positive examples for younger generations. Change begins with each of us."

See more: [Don't Stand By, Step In: Training Resources](#)



Violence against Women and Girls Prevention Pilot

By Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council and Talk Listen Change, a registered charity

A new pilot programme has been launched in Tameside to educate both boys and girls about what constitutes violence against women and girls and what its effects are.

The pilot has been commissioned by Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council and developed in partnership with safeguarding leads, commissioners, teachers, parents and young people. The pilot will take place in schools for between eight and ten weeks and is being delivered by the charity TLC: Talk, Listen Change.

The programme covers:

- Identifying and reporting sexism
- Public harassment
- Unhealthy, abusive behaviour
- Online behaviour
- Objectification of women
- Consent
- Healthy relationships

The trial began in primary schools in the 2023-2024 school year, with secondary schools in the area joining from September 2024.

The council cites research by the charity Safe Lives, which showed nearly half of boys and a third of girls aged 13 and 14 think hitting a partner is 'okay'. A separate survey by End Violence Against Women Coalition found that just under a third of girls do not feel safe from sexual harassment in school.

"My hope and optimism is events like this and the innovation we have seen today."



"The sad fact is that we've seen a shocking rise in sexism in our schools over the past few years [...] That's why this new pilot is so important. We need to be having frank, honest conversations with children that might be exposed to these attitudes and help them to understand how to build healthy relationships and how to support each other."

– John Hughes, TLC Service Manager.

Dr Anna Harris, clinical psychologist and head of Coram's Creative Therapies team, said:

"We are really proud to introduce the Family Harmony Toolkit. We have developed this creative resource to help families reduce the challenges of conflict within their relationships. This initiative empowers families to strengthen their relationships and build emotional resilience in ways that are both therapeutic and engaging. We anticipate this will provide many creative opportunities to support families to have fun and connect together."

Family Harmony Toolkit

By [Coram](#), a registered charity

Developed by [Coram's Creative Therapies team](#) in collaboration with the Department for Work and Pensions, the Family Harmony Toolkit offers a framework to help practitioners support families experiencing difficulties in communication and additional pressures on family life such as transitions and supporting a child with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) which can all exacerbate conflict within families.

The toolkit is based on the Family Harmony Intervention, developed and facilitated by Coram's Parenting and Creative Therapy Service. The intervention is an innovative and strengths-based multi-family group

programme promoting family attunement, with a strong emphasis on healthy communication, enhancing skills in emotional regulation, mentalising, mindfulness, attentive listening and calming techniques.

The toolkit provides practical resources, including session guides and activities that draw from family therapy, music therapy, and art therapy interventions. Session guides and activities can be used as part of a planned programme or in isolation, in groups or with individual families.

An evaluation of the Family Harmony Intervention found that families positively engaged with the programme with 42 of the 65 families (64%) referred onto the 10-week programme taking up the offer. Among the families that started Family

Harmony, 60% completed it, with families with a child with SEND more likely to complete it. Parents and carers reported that they and their family members benefited from a better understanding of each other, strengthened communication and shifts in parenting style. Children enjoyed the art and music activities and spending quality time with their parents/carers. Families also noted the value of being able to seek further support if needed and not feeling alone in the face of challenges, as well as feeling more connected to their local community.

[Download the free Family Harmony Toolkit](#)

[Read the evaluation of the Family Harmony Programme](#)





AI tools to support co-parent communication

By Relate at Family Action, a company limited by guarantee

Relate, a leading relationship support charity, has launched **a suite of AI tools designed to support separated co-parents, couples, and carers in improving communication, reducing conflict, and fostering positive relationships**. Funded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) as part of the Reducing Parental Conflict (RPC) Challenge Fund, these tools aim to empower families to make informed decisions and prioritise the wellbeing of their children. By providing resources such as language analysis, child-focused insights, and practical co-parenting advice, Relate is helping families navigate the challenges of separation with greater ease and confidence.

Relate's AI tools include:

Sounding-Board Bot:

- Provides feedback on drafted messages, offering suggestions for clearer, more empathetic wording to prevent miscommunication and conflict.
- Example: A WhatsApp message to an ex-partner about childcare arrangements is analyzed to ensure its tone is neutral and constructive.

In-the-Middle Bot:

- Offers insights into a child's perspective in various co-parenting scenarios, helping parents make decisions that prioritise their child's needs.
- Example: Helps parents understand the potential emotional impact of a schedule change on their child.

RelateBot:

- Provides expert co-parenting advice and practical support, along with recommendations for articles, books, and other resources.

"We are really proud to be able to offer these tools for parents, carers and practitioners. We hope that we can develop them and that people will access them before seeking legal advice, as we strongly believe that where possible it is beneficial for families to resolve separation and conflict without involving the family court system." – Jude Gordon, Supporting Families Programme Manager at Relate

See more: 'New AI tools facilitate clearer communication for couples and co-parents'



Chapter 3

Workforce recruitment and retention

A strong, well-supported workforce is the foundation of effective children's services. Recruiting and retaining high-quality staff is essential for ensuring stability, consistency, and excellence in service delivery. This chapter explores approaches being trialled across the sector to attract, develop, and retain talent, while fostering workplace environments that value and empower staff.

The initiatives highlighted in this chapter underscore the importance of investing in workforce sustainability. By embracing innovative recruitment strategies, fostering professional growth, and prioritising staff wellbeing, children's services can create resilient, motivated teams empowered to deliver highquality support to children and families.



- 32 Marketplace and Talent Bank
- 32 Employee ownership trust in residential childcare
- 33 Social Work Academy
- 33 Coram Innovation Incubator's Ignite Programme
- 34 Social Work Academy
- 34 OnSide Talent Academy
- 36 Pathways to Short Breaks
- 36 Keeping children engaged in education by #ThinkingDifferently

Marketplace and Talent Bank

By [East of England Local Government Association](#)

The East of England Local Government Marketplace **enables trading companies and traded services owned by or part of a local authority in the East of England to advertise their services and trade with other local authorities in the East of England.**

The East of England Local Government Association's Marketplace has the unique position whereby services can be purchased between member authorities with exemption from the public procurement regulations and therefore avoiding the resources and expense involved in a tender or quotation process.

Similarly, The East of England LGA Talent Bank provides access to a range of high quality Associates in areas that are a priority for East of England LGA members. It provides a quick and easy way to access additional capacity and

expertise when members need it, available without the need to conduct a procurement process.

Associates can be provided either on a day rate, or on a project package basis. Profiles of relevant Associates can be viewed on their online Marketplace. The Marketplace also showcases trading services or trading companies that are managed or owned by member councils, encouraging them to buy services from each other where appropriate.

See more: [East of England Local Government Marketplace](#)

Employee ownership trust in residential childcare

By [Halliwell Homes EOT Ltd.](#)

Halliwell is a social enterprise offering "clinically informed practice" through the medium of education and residential care. In 2022, **Halliwell Homes transitioned to an Employee Ownership Trust (EOT), aligning its mission of improving the psychological wellbeing of children in care with the interests of its staff.** This move aimed to create a stable workforce for delivering the Restorative Parenting Recovery Programme, helping children transition to mainstream schools and family placements within two years.

The EOT model provides stability in a

sector often dominated by private equity, ensuring consistent care for children and creating financial benefits for staff, including future access to tax-free dividends. *"This structure supports the long-term quality and consistency of our services,"* says Managing Director Rob McKay.

Employee ownership has fostered a sense of belonging and engagement among staff. Halliwell introduced initiatives like newsletters, feedback sessions, and six-monthly presentations, with plans to include staff representation on the board. New benefits, such as annual "Halliversary" bonuses, subsidised gym memberships, and free counselling, reflect staff feedback and prioritise wellbeing.

The EOT structure has improved

recruitment and retention, achieving full staffing in 2023 despite sector-wide challenges. Longer staff tenure ensures stability and better outcomes for children in Halliwell's care.

Halliwell's approach has received external praise, with an 'outstanding' 2023 Ofsted report highlighting the stability of the staff team and the remarkable progress of children with complex needs. Halliwell Homes' EOT journey demonstrates how employee ownership can transform care services, ensuring consistent, high-quality support for vulnerable children while empowering and rewarding staff.



"We've set a new standard in residential care by prioritising staff wellbeing and engagement," says McKay. **"This is a long-term commitment to creating better outcomes for both staff and the children we support."**

Social Work Academy

By Gloucestershire County Council

Launched in 2019, Gloucestershire's Social Work Academy has established itself as **a hub for professional development, supporting children's social workers and allied professionals across the county.** The Academy's mission is to cultivate a learning culture that nurtures outstanding practitioners and leaders who can drive positive outcomes for children, young people, and families in Gloucestershire.

The Social Work Academy was designed to inspire, challenge, and support practitioners at every stage of their professional journey. Its comprehensive learning programmes

address local practice needs, role-specific requirements, and broader professional development goals. By prioritising a culture of continuous learning, the Academy empowers social workers and other professionals to reach their full potential and make a meaningful impact.

The Academy offers a variety of bespoke learning opportunities tailored to Gloucestershire's unique practice needs. It also provides access to external learning experiences, enriching the breadth and depth of professional development. A key partnership with Research in Practice grants eligible staff access to evidence-based resources and events, ensuring that practice is informed by the latest research and insights.

To further enhance practice, Gloucestershire partnered with the Centre for Systemic Social Work to roll out systemic practice training. This initiative introduces a transformative approach to social work, equipping practitioners with tools to better understand and support families within their broader contexts.

Through its dynamic learning programmes and strategic partnerships, the Social Work Academy exemplifies Gloucestershire County Council's commitment to raising the standard of children's services. By fostering an environment that values professional growth, the Academy is paving the way for more effective social work practices across the county.

Coram Innovation Incubator's Ignite Programme

By Coram, a registered charity

Ignite Leadership Programme: A Catalyst for Innovation in Children's Services

Transforming Challenges into Opportunities

The Coram Innovation Incubator (CII) Ignite Leadership Programme is a short course designed to equip professionals in children's services with the confidence and tools to develop, pilot, and implement innovative projects within their organisations. By combining design thinking, coaching, and peer support, Ignite empowers participants to tackle complex challenges, identify user needs, and create impactful solutions.

North Yorkshire Council: A Case Study in Innovation

North Yorkshire Council, with support from the Coram Innovation Incubator, Microsoft, and funding from the Department for Education's Children's Social Care Digital and Data Solutions Fund, used Ignite as a springboard for new ideas. They have been exploring a technological solution to consolidate and analyse data from various sources, enabling social workers to access critical information about a child instantly. By using analytics tools to map the significant people and places in a child's

life, the council aims to identify support networks and potential risks, leading to more informed and proactive decisions to safeguard children.

Key Benefits of Participating in CII Ignite

- Address specific organisational challenges and improve outcomes for children and families.
- Master design thinking, business experimentation, and evaluation techniques.
- Deepen insights into user experiences.
- Benefit from increased networking and peer support across the children's services sector.
- Space for reflection and self-development
- Two coaching sessions with a professional design thinking coach

Ready to Ignite Your Potential?

Don't miss this opportunity to develop your innovation skills and drive positive change in children's services.

To register your interest or for further information about Ignite 2025, please email innovation@coram.org.uk.

"Working together with partners like Coram-i facilitates the development of new and effective technical solutions."

– North Yorkshire Council

Participant Testimonials

"I learned how to define a problem by seeking to understand staff, service and user experiences rather than the single person or management perspective/assumption. The seeking of solutions and ways forward was therefore shaped by shared understanding, ownership and motivation."

"I'm constantly looking at how to improve practice, and the [course] has given me much more confidence at being able to do this without being overwhelmed by more structural or financial barriers."

"It made me feel like innovation is not limited to a set department or those in the upper echelons of practice...I really feel like anybody can bring innovation to their practice and in a multitude of ways."



Social Work Academy

By [Hull City Council](#)

The **Hull Social Work Academy** is an initiative by Hull City Council aimed at supporting and developing social workers throughout every stage of their career. By offering tailored learning opportunities, structured professional development pathways, and a nurturing learning environment, the Academy equips social workers with the skills and knowledge they need to make a meaningful difference in the lives of children, young people, and their families.

Hull aspires to be the best place to practice social work, and the Academy plays a central role in achieving this goal. Recognising that the workforce is its most valuable resource, the Council established the Academy to foster ambitious practice standards and inspire social workers to achieve excellence.

The Hull Social Work Academy provides a multi-faceted support structure that integrates all aspects of learning and development for social workers, from initial training to leadership roles.

The Academy works closely with local universities to enhance student recruitment, placement opportunities, and teaching content. It oversees **Step Up to Social Work** and **social work apprenticeships**, ensuring a strong foundation for aspiring social workers.

The Academy has developed a robust framework for Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) during their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE). This includes:

- A structured induction programme.
- A dedicated learning pathway.
- A clear caseload promise within a protected environment.

This commitment to early career support was nationally recognised in 2021 when one of Hull's social workers won the NQSW of the Year Award.

The Academy offers vocational awards at levels 3, 4, and 5, facilitated by two Professional Development Assessors. Additionally, the Council's in-house learning and development team, recently rated "Good" by Ofsted, provides a wide range of training, including safeguarding courses and bespoke learning opportunities.

Leadership is a cornerstone of Hull's approach to improving social work practice.

Managers benefit from:

- Modules on Developing Effective Leadership, Reflective Supervision, and Building Emotionally Resilient Teams through partnerships with Research in Practice and the Department for Education.
- Participation in the ADCS (Association of Directors of Children's Services) Aspirant Leaders Programme and the Practice Supervisors Development Programme.
- A new Hull-designed Aspiring Leadership Course to nurture talent and 'grow our own' future leaders.

See more: [About the Social Work Academy](#)

OnSide Talent Academy

By [OnSide Youth Zones](#), a registered charity

The OnSide Talent Academy is part of OnSide Youth Zones, focusing on personal and professional development for their team members. Onside is a national youth charity that believes all young people should have the opportunity to discover their passion and their purpose.

The Talent Academy was created to provide training and development opportunities for colleagues from OnSide and across their wider network, as well as to recognise and develop outstanding performers.

Core offers include:

- Short **masterclasses to support team members with specific development areas**, such as project management, mental health and street-based youth work.
- **Aspiring Leaders**: A 12-month programme that develops

outstanding performers from across the network who have the leadership potential to progress to an executive-level role. The course consists of leadership modules, coaching, and a placement in another Youth Zone.

- **Effective People Manager Programme**: A four-month programme designed to encourage great people management skills, aimed at those new to line management. This programme covers topics including the transition from friends to manager, leadership principles and communications. Participants are matched with mentors to support their individual needs.
- Level two to three **certificates/diplomas in Youth Work**.
- **Board Development**: A series of modules to support Youth Zone Boards with effective fulfilment of their duties to drive Youth Zone forward. Board members on this course will gain greater insight into their role as a trustee and how they

can best support their Youth Zone.

Key achievements to date:

- Supported 55 frontline staff to achieve a Level 3 Diploma in Youth Work Practice in partnership with the National Youth Agency.
- Established an Aspiring Leaders programme that recognises and develops outstanding performers, enhances organisational capability and grows tomorrow's senior leaders. 87% have been promoted since completing the training.
- Developed a Fundraising Academy which has equipped fundraisers with knowledge and skills to enhance stakeholder management and secure new funding partners.
- Enhanced specialist skills through a series of bespoke masterclasses; including safeguarding training for 120 staff and volunteers, and governance training for 9 Youth Zone Boards.

See more: [Talent Academy](#)

Chapter 4

Child and adolescent mental health, wellbeing and skills

As more children and adolescents face mental health challenges and services become increasingly stretched, innovative approaches are essential to improving access to support. This chapter explores initiatives designed to enhance mental health and wellbeing for young people, ensuring they receive the care, skills, and resources needed to thrive.

The case studies within this chapter illustrate the growing emphasis on early intervention, community-driven solutions, and traumainformed care in improving children's mental health and wellbeing. By fostering collaborative and evidence-based approaches, services can better support the next generation's emotional resilience and overall development.



- 37 Young People's Gambling Harm Education Programmes
- 37 Children and Young People's Trauma Informed Care Programme
- 38 Face It
- 38 Wakefield Awareness Support Project
- 39 Bridges
- 40 Redesign of SEMH services
- 40 Coproduced services putting young people at the heart of mental health support
- 41 Sonic Minds
- 42 Building Connections
- 44 Language For Life
- 45 AllChild

Pathways to Short Breaks

By [Bristol Council](#)

Funded by the Department for Education's Short Breaks Innovation Fund, this project is specifically designed **to support children and young people aged from 8-18 with social communication and interaction needs, who are experiencing anxiety and are socially isolated**. Called 'Pathway to Short Breaks', it aims to pair children and young people between the ages of seven and 18 with a specialist engagement worker, who will support and encourage them to try out new activities while building their resilience using techniques for managing anxiety.

In total, upwards of 80 children and young people were given the opportunity to access the service during the pilot from 2023 to 2024.

Post intervention, the program has worked to increase engagement outside the home, improve educational attendance and improve wellbeing.

As of December 2024, Bristol City Council is exploring a new funding model to sustain this valuable work that has made a positive impact for so many children and young people in the City.

"Children experiencing mental health issues being seven times more likely to have missed at least 15 days of school compared to those without."

- Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, NHS, 2023



Keeping children engaged in education by #ThinkingDifferently

By [Anna Freud](#), a registered charity

Anna Freud is a mental health charity that has been supporting children and young people for over 70 years.

In 2024, they launched their first ever manifesto: 'Thinking differently: A manifesto on how prevention and early intervention can close the gap in children and young people's mental health'.

The Anna Freud Centre's initiative, "Keeping Children Engaged in Education by #ThinkingDifferently," focuses on **strategies to maintain and enhance student engagement in educational settings**. This project addresses the growing concern of disengagement among children and young people, particularly those facing mental health challenges.

Drawing from the findings of [ImpactEd's January 2024 report, 'Understanding Attendance'](#), Anna Freud have highlighted **several key factors that have the possibility to enhance school attendance**:

- Enhancing a 'sense of school belonging'.

- Greater attention to the emerging challenge of a 'second transition' from Year 7 to Year 8.
- Acknowledgement that attendance drivers are intersectional.
- Awareness of sanctions and consequences isn't strongly linked to improved attendance.

Their five-point plan outlines the following aims:

- 1 Prevention: giving young people a meaningful say**
 - Design, test and evaluate prevention strategies.
 - Partner with children and young people who have lived experience of mental ill health and come from backgrounds that are often overlooked or underserved.
 - Create a cross-governmental task force to scrutinise the potential impacts of policy.
- 2 Focus on communities**
 - Community assets.
 - Wider workforce training.
 - Community-based early intervention e.g. family hubs.
 - Community-led early interventions for marginalised groups.
 - Collect, analyse and act on local data.

- 3 Adopt a whole-school approach**
 - Social, emotional and physical development alongside academic development.
 - Preventative mental health programmes in schools.
 - Staff training.
 - Programmes delivered in partnership with schools that help parents/carers.
- 4 Widen our collective understanding of childhood trauma**
 - Cross-disciplinary framework and shared language on childhood trauma.
 - Digital prevention and early intervention services.
 - Training for the wider workforce.
 - Cross-nation collaborations to collect and share best practice across the UK.
- 5 Leverage the power of science and data**
 - Standardise definitions and measurement.
 - Regular nationwide measurement.
 - Single point of access to mental health resources and services.
 - Integration and sharing of digital information.

See more: [Thinking Differently](#)

Young People's Gambling Harm Education Programmes

By [GamCare](#), a registered charity

GamCare is the leading provider of information, advice and support for anyone affected by gambling harms. Working with staff and service users, GamCare have identified **four major strategic ambitions**:

- 1 Gambling harms are widely recognised and prevented.
- 2 Universal access to effective tools and support.
- 3 Universal access to caring, evidenced and integrated treatment.
- 4 GamCare's work is trusted, valued and effective.

For children and young people, GamCare provide a range of different services to support young people ranging from in person workshops, digital tools and resources to online support and indirect support for professionals and parents. They also provide age-appropriate treatment as part of a [Young People's Service](#), which strives to provide direct support to under-18s across the UK who are 'at risk' of or experiencing harm because of gambling.

GamCare's work is guided by their Youth Advisory Board, who consult, advise, co-develop and do-deliver jointly with them to ensure that they are creating services young people want and need. Their work with young people is rated Advanced by the National Youth Agency, and they are registered Youth Friendly Employers by Youth

Employment UK. They are also Approved Activity Providers for the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

They provide:

- Education for young people via their dedicated [website](#) for young people, as well as via interactive workshops.
- Young People's Support Service.
- Workshops and training for professionals working with young people.
- Discussion-based workshops for parents and carers.
- A network for organisations delivering gambling education to young people, The English Gambling Education Hub, created with six other providers of gambling education.

Children and Young People's Trauma Informed Care Programme

By [Humber and North Yorkshire Health and Social Care Partnership](#)

In 2021, the Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care System (ICS) initiated a decade-long Children and Young People's Trauma-Informed Care Programme, funded by NHS England's National Health and Justice Team. This collaborative effort involves health services, local authorities, and the voluntary and community sector, all working together to enhance support for vulnerable

children and adolescents who have experienced trauma or are at risk of entering the youth justice system.

The programme focuses on two primary objectives:

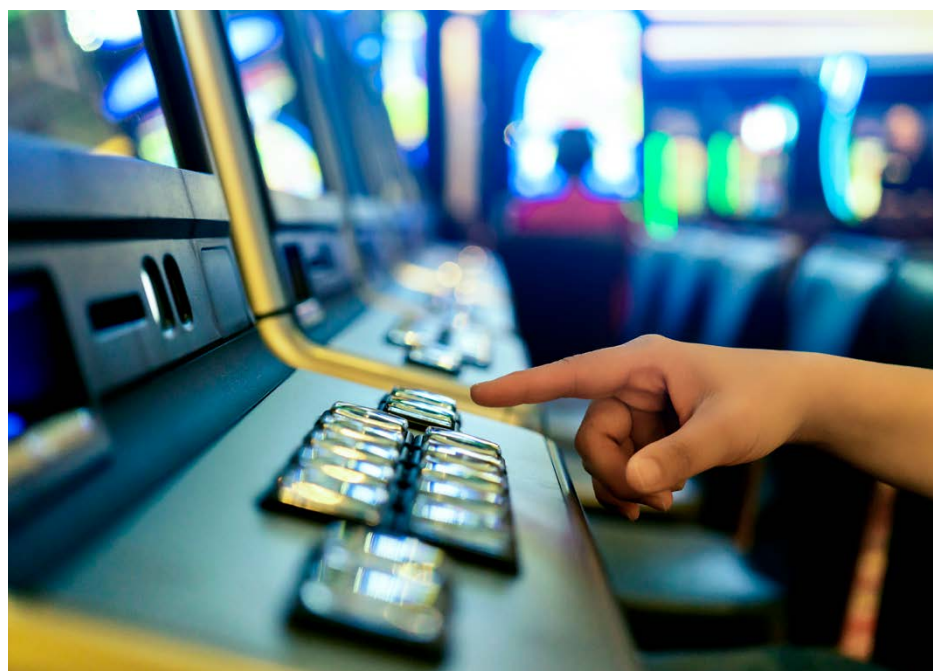
- 1 **Systemic transformation:**
Implementing a consistent trauma-informed approach across all partner organisations to ensure cohesive and compassionate care for at-risk youth.
- 2 **Innovative interventions:**
Establishing "Test and Learn" sites to pilot new strategies aimed at diverting young people from initial involvement with the youth justice system.

One notable "Test and Learn" initiative is Hull's Flipside project, led by The Warren and Cornerhouse. This holistic model offers trauma-informed interventions, including one-on-one therapeutic sessions and group activities, to prevent first-time offenses among youth. The project integrates into existing structures, such as multi-agency diversion panels, collaborating with partners like Youth Justice Services, police, and social care.

The programme's commitment to excellence was recognised when it was shortlisted as a finalist in the Youth Justice Award category at the Children and Young People Now Awards 2024. This acknowledgment highlights the initiative's significant contribution to improving life chances for young individuals at risk of offending.

By fostering a trauma-informed culture and testing innovative interventions, the Humber and North Yorkshire ICS aims to create a supportive environment where vulnerable children and young people can thrive, reducing their risk of entering the justice system.

See more: [Children and Young People's Trauma Informed Care Programme](#)



Face It

By [Khulisa](#), a registered charity

Khulisa (meaning “to nurture” in Zulu) is an award-winning national charity dedicated to empowering young people aged 11-25 who have been affected by trauma or adversity. Such experiences can disrupt the development of essential social and emotional skills, leaving lasting impacts on their lives.

Face It, Khulisa’s **intensive therapeutic programme, is designed to enhance the wellbeing and social-emotional skills of young people with complex needs.** Building on their history of delivering therapeutic wellbeing programmes to schools for young people at risk of exclusion, Khulisa began piloting a comprehensive ‘whole school approach’ in 2018. This initiative aims to improve the social and emotional

wellbeing of all students by engaging with schools at every level.

The Face It programme spans three years and offers holistic support to schools, including services for senior leadership teams, school staff, parents and carers, as well as students themselves. By addressing trauma and disadvantage collaboratively, the programme fosters long-term change.

In line with their 2024 strategy, Khulisa aims to expand its reach by working with more schools to deliver deeper, term-long programmes lasting 12 weeks.

These programmes are designed to:

- Address non-academic barriers to success, including attendance, behaviour, and social-emotional wellbeing.
- Strengthen parent and carer engagement.
- Enhance teaching staff’s skills and

confidence, contributing to improved teacher retention.

- Support schools in adhering to Pupil Premium Guidance and Ofsted requirements.

The impact of the Face It programme is clear. Among young people who participated between 2021 and 2022, **Khulisa reported the following outcomes:**

- 60% experienced improved emotional regulation.
- 77% developed and used effective coping skills.
- 73% enhanced their pro-social skills.
- 71% reported increased resilience.
- 60% showed improved overall wellbeing.

See more: [Face It](#)

Wakefield Awareness Support Project

By [Kids](#), a registered charity

WASP is a specialised service offering a distinctive approach to supporting the emotional well-being of children and young people. Designed for those experiencing anxiety and low mood due to Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC) or other neuro-developmental conditions—whether diagnosed or not—WASP provides tailored support to meet individual needs.

Funded by Wakefield CCG and delivered by KIDS, WASP stands out by focusing on both young people and their families without being diagnosis-led. It combines two complementary elements to deliver a bespoke support package: one targeted at young people and the other at parents and carers. Together, these elements create a holistic approach to fostering emotional resilience and well-being.

The aim of WASP is to work alongside existing commissioned services to identify children and young people with ASC or other neuro-developmental conditions who need support for their emotional well-being. By addressing challenges early, WASP helps prevent situations from escalating to the point where more intensive interventions may be required.

Their offer includes:

Support for young people

- Intervention practitioners work directly with young people, offering time-limited, goal-focused interventions that build resilience and support emotional well-being. This might involve:
- Lego Therapy sessions to encourage social skills and problem-solving.
- Activities inspired by The Big Life Journal to boost self-esteem and promote positive self-reflection.
- Guidance on navigating life transitions and challenges related to social interactions and communication.
- Practitioners also connect young people with other services and resources as needed, ensuring a seamless support experience.

Support for Parents and Carers

Recognising the critical role of families, WASP runs parallel programs to empower parents and carers. This includes:

- Peer-to-peer support networks that connect parents with others who have lived similar experiences.
- Training programs, such as Expert Parent experience courses, and online workshops tailored to their needs.
- Regular phone calls and check-ins to provide consistent, personalised guidance.

These efforts aim to build parents’ resilience and confidence, equipping them to better support their children and access appropriate help in the future.

WASP begins with a comprehensive assessment led by a **Participation Coordinator**, who gathers information about the young person’s and family’s needs. From there, a tailored support plan is developed to ensure the interventions align with individual preferences and goals.

By working collaboratively with families, **WASP sets clear, measurable objectives, ensuring the support provided leads to meaningful outcomes for both young people and their parents or carers.**

- WASP welcomes families facing challenges related to social interactions, communication, or other neuro-developmental disorders, regardless of whether a formal diagnosis has been made.
- By addressing the needs of both young people and their families, WASP creates a supportive environment where everyone can thrive.
- Support plans are customised, allowing families to access the resources and guidance that suit them best.

See more: [Wakefield Awareness Support Project](#)

Bridges

By Manx Care and St Christopher's, a registered charity

In 2023, following the success of an initial pilot, Manx Care partnered with St Christopher's Wraparound Therapeutic Services to launch Bridges, **a service designed to improve the mental health and wellbeing of children, young people, and their families both before and after care.**

Bridges was developed to address the specific needs of the Isle of Man community, focusing on early intervention to support families in crisis and prevent children from entering care wherever possible. By providing AMBIT-informed therapeutic support (Adaptive Mentalisation Based Integrative Treatment), Bridges works collaboratively with families to create positive change and maintain family stability.

Bridges places emphasis on a whole-family approach, ensuring that the needs of all family members are addressed. This inclusive method allows for long-term improvements, providing families with the tools to build resilience and sustain positive relationships.

By focusing on early intervention, the service:

- Supports families experiencing significant difficulties that could lead to care proceedings.
- Provides intensive therapeutic support to help resolve crises.
- Works with both children and their families to safely keep children within their family homes, where appropriate.

The success of this approach is further enhanced through collaboration with other leading agencies, enabling holistic and coordinated support for families.

The Bridges initiative has made a significant contribution to the Isle of Man community and was formally shortlisted for the prestigious Family Support Award by the industry publication Children and Young People Now's 2024 Awards. This recognition highlights the service's achievements and its ongoing positive impact on the lives of children, young people, and families.

"We are delighted that our proactive and timely approach to working with families can help to prevent children and young people coming into care and enable those we support to have a brighter future together."

Clare Maude, Wraparound Therapeutic Manager, St Christopher's



Redesign of SEMH services

By [Newcastle City Council](#)

Newcastle's redesign of their Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH) services involved closing four additionally resourced provisions (ARPs) in primary schools and establishing a new service structure.

This new approach includes eight specialist teachers and nine specialist support assistants, divided into four locality teams. The service aims to support schools in managing SEMH needs more effectively within mainstream settings.

The redesign aimed to:

- Strengthen SEMH provision in mainstream primary schools.
- Reduce the number of pupils requiring specialist provision.
- Support schools in helping children cope and adapt effectively.

- Provide a universal offer with regular school visits and support.

Since the implementation of the redesigned services, achievements include:

- 2,400 school visits conducted since October 2023.
- 300 individual pupils, along with staff training and advice meetings, received support.
- Significant reduction in calls and referrals to specialist SEND services.
- Positive feedback from primary leaders and school staff.
- Expansion plans to include Year 7 from September 2024.

The redesign has not been without obstacles. **Challenges faced include:**

- Initial scepticism from primary leaders who wanted more ARP places.
- Managing high levels of activity and behavioural issues in pupils.

- Ensuring continuous professional development and training for staff.

This project has revealed several key insights:

- Building strong relationships with schools and locality services is crucial.
- Regular, practical support and specialist expertise are highly valued by schools and families.
- Addressing presenting behaviours rather than focusing solely on diagnoses can lead to significant positive impacts.
- Continuous engagement and feedback from schools help refine and improve service delivery.

See more: [Social, Emotional & Mental Health \(SEMH\) Service](#)

Coproduced services putting young people at the heart of mental health support

By [Dyfodol Ni](#), a youth-led partnership of 17 organisations across Ceredigion

Funded by the National Lottery Community Fund's Mind Our Future Programme, Dyfodol Ni is a **youth-led initiative in Ceredigion focused on transforming mental health services for young people**. By adopting a co-produced model, Dyfodol Ni places young people at the centre of decision-making, ensuring that mental health interventions are designed and delivered to meet their needs.

A defining feature of Dyfodol Ni is its youth-led structure, where young people are given full authority over the development and operation of the project. During the Development Period, decision-making was overseen by a Young People's Management Committee (YPMC), made up of individuals aged 14 to 25. The YPMC was responsible for managing the project's budget, guiding its direction, and overseeing Engagement Officers, who conducted consultations and gathered insights on their behalf.

To gather meaningful feedback, Dyfodol Ni hosted 37 engagement events, ranging from music festivals and sports activities to arts and crafts and theatre workshops. Some events attracted over 100 participants, creating opportunities for young people to share their views and experiences. Over the course of the Development Period, Engagement Officers connected with 1,200 young people through conversations about their aspirations, challenges, and ideas for improving mental health services in Ceredigion.

From these consultations, three key priorities were identified:

Safe spaces: Young people highlighted the need for spaces exclusively for them to promote well-being and connection.

Access to services: Unequal access to services based on location was raised as a significant issue, with calls for a wider and more consistent range of support.

Transport: Limited transport options were identified as a major barrier to accessing mental health services.

The YPMC analysed the feedback gathered and developed two new projects to address the priorities identified:

- **Feelz on Wheelz / Llyw a Byw**
A mobile youth café and support service designed to overcome transport barriers and bring mental health services directly to young people in their communities.
- **Safe Space to Speak / Safle Saff i Siarad' (S):**
A youth lobbying group that acts as a representative body for young people in Ceredigion. This group collaborates with partner organisations to advocate for improved services and drive change in the region.



"[The Innovation Leadership course provided a] dedicated time to plan, think and reflect but with practical outcomes which you can use!"

Sonic Minds

By Lewisham Music, a registered charity

Sonic Minds is an award-winning creative music programme delivered by Lewisham Music and funded by Youth Music and BBC Children in Need. Over the course of two years, this programme has already supported over 300 young people identified as being at elevated risk of developing mental health challenges.

At its core, Sonic Minds aims to explore and deepen understanding of the connection between music-making and young people's emotional well-being, providing evidence of how music can be a powerful tool in promoting mental health.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing mental health struggles for many young people. Experiences of trauma, social isolation, disrupted routines, and a breakdown in support systems have left countless young people facing increased anxiety and uncertainty.

In response to this pressing need, **Sonic Minds** was launched to offer young people a safe, creative outlet to process their emotions and improve their well-being. The programme uses **collaborative songwriting** and **music production** as a means to help young people express their feelings, share their stories, and celebrate their identity.

Led by a team of skilled **Music Leaders**, Sonic Minds creates opportunities for young people to explore difficult emotions, build resilience, and foster connections with others, all through the transformative power of music.

Music has long been recognised for its ability to improve mood, help people process emotions, and foster connection. While many people use music to lift their spirits or manage stress, actively creating music takes this a step further. It enables deeper emotional expression and strengthens bonds with oneself and others.

The **Sonic Minds** programme taps into these benefits, contributing to a **growing body of evidence that shows**



music-making can:

- Improve mood and foster a sense of well-being.
- Promote self-expression, enhancing resilience and self-esteem.
- Reduce anxiety and help with relaxation and stress management.
- Boost motivation and focus.

Traditionally, music and mental health have been explored within the field of music therapy, which follows clinical standards. However, **community music initiatives** like Sonic Minds are increasingly demonstrating that non-clinical approaches can also have a profound impact, especially when tailored to the needs of young people.

Sonic Minds builds on **Lewisham Music's** commitment to child-centred and youth-led practice. The programme offers a safe and supportive environment for young people to explore their feelings through music, guided by experienced practitioners. By focusing on collaboration and creativity, the programme empowers young people to develop new coping strategies and build vital networks of support.

In a year marked by isolation, anxiety, and, for many, trauma, Sonic Minds provides an essential resource for young people facing challenging circumstances. Music offers a unique way of reaching young people, and when facilitated by skilled

professionals, it becomes a powerful medium for connection and healing.

Sonic Minds contributes to the growing research demonstrating the benefits of music-making on mental health. As part of this work, **the programme highlights how music can:**

- Support self-expression and emotional regulation.
- Build resilience and improve an individual's sense of self.
- Provide a constructive outlet for stress and anxiety.

By fostering these positive outcomes, Sonic Minds is helping to redefine the role of music in mental health support, extending its reach beyond traditional music therapy to community settings where it can benefit even more young people.

In a time when young people are facing unprecedented mental health challenges, programmes like Sonic Minds are more critical than ever. Through collaborative, creative practices, Sonic Minds is not only helping young people cope with their mental health challenges but also laying the foundation for a future where music is recognised as a vital tool for emotional well-being.

As **Lewisham Music** continues to innovate and advocate for the transformative power of music, Sonic Minds serves as a testament to how creativity and collaboration can make a meaningful difference in the lives of young people.

See more: Sonic Minds

Building Connections

By [UK Youth](#), a registered charity

UK Youth is a leading charity with a vision that all young people are equipped to thrive and empowered to contribute at every stage of their lives. Building on the success of their Reach Up programme (2017–22), **Building Connections was launched to strengthen pathways into employment for young people.**

Building Connections is an employability initiative aimed at young people aged 16–25 who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) or are at risk of becoming so. The programme is designed to help young people identify their passions and interests, while providing them with personalised guidance to achieve their career goals. Additionally, it invests in youth workers, enabling them to create robust employment pathways and deepen their impact on young people's lives.

In partnership with Coca-Cola Europacific Partners and delivered by organisations including Greater Manchester Youth Network (GMYN), Together As One (TAO), Sussex Clubs for Young People (SCYP), and Young Leicestershire, the programme equips youth workers with the tools to serve as Community Link Workers. These workers foster relationships with employers and support young people in exploring and pursuing employment opportunities.

A central feature of the programme is facilitating real-time connections between young people and employers through events. These range from interactive workshops to large-scale job fairs, all focused on breaking down barriers to employment and fostering meaningful connections.

Greater Manchester Youth Network (GMYN)

[GMYN](#) hosted three workshop-style events in Salford, Bury, and Manchester, where young people and employers collaborated to discuss local employment challenges, barriers, and opportunities. The events culminated in a showcase of videos created by young people as part of the programme, providing a platform for their voices to be heard and celebrated.

Young Leicestershire

[Young Leicestershire](#) organised a series of smaller, wave-based events tailored to neurodivergent and disabled young people. These safe, inclusive spaces enabled over 45 participants from local colleges and **Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)** youth groups to meet employers and learn about employment support services, empowering them to take their first steps into the workforce.

Together As One (TAO)

[Together As One](#), in collaboration with **Coca-Cola Europacific Partners** volunteers, hosted Slough's first youth-led job fair, a large-scale evening event attended by over 80 young people. The fair featured opportunities to explore apprenticeships, participate in mock interviews, and connect with local employers. Highlights included an **Augmented Reality activity** and pizza, creating an engaging and accessible atmosphere for attendees.

Sussex Clubs for Young People (SCYP)

In partnership with local MP **Mims Davies**, [SCYP](#) held their event at Haywards Heath College, attracting over 80 young people and 60 local employers and support organisations. To make the experience less overwhelming, attendees were given a scavenger hunt-style checklist, guiding them to resources for CV building, wellbeing support, and employment opportunities.



Chapter 5

Early help and intervention

Effective early intervention plays a crucial role in improving outcomes for children, young people, and families by identifying challenges at an early stage and providing targeted support before issues escalate. This chapter explores a range of initiatives designed to deliver proactive, preventative approaches, ensuring that families receive the right help at the right time.

This chapter highlights how early intervention, when designed with a collaborative, evidence-led approach, has the power to prevent crises, strengthen family and community relationships, and improve long-term life chances for children and young people. The initiatives showcased here serve as valuable examples of how strategic, well-implemented early help can lead to more resilient and thriving communities.



- 46 Upstream England
- 47 Reimagining pre-proceedings
- 48 Family Hubs Networks
- 49 Camden Young Pathways Finder
- 50 Blocks
- 51 Art at the Start
- 52 Your Choice
- 53 EXODUS
- 54 The Coram Institute for Children
- 55 VRU Community Mental Health and Emotional Well-being Support Pilot
- 56 The Door is *Still* Closed
- 59 Multidisciplinary approaches to adoption assessment and support processes

Language For Life

By [Bath & North East Somerset Council](#) and [St John's Foundation](#), a registered charity

In partnership with St John's Foundation, Bath and North East Somerset Council (B&NES), the Language for Life programme is tackling early communication and language needs in two key areas of the local authority. By focusing on early intervention, this **area-specific, multi-agency initiative aims to improve long-term educational outcomes for children.**

Language for Life began in 2021 as a three-year multi-agency pilot funded by St John's Foundation. Closely aligned with the Foundation's Primary Empowerment Project, the programme addresses the persistent gap in educational outcomes between children receiving free school meals (Pupil Premium) and their peers in B&NES.

The pilot initially targeted early years settings in south-west Bath and south Keynsham, where participating settings have since been awarded the Language for Life Quality Mark. The programme is now entering its second rollout, a two-year initiative focusing on early years settings in the Somer Valley area.

The core aim of the programme is to "close the word gap" by equipping early years practitioners with the skills and resources to support children's communication and language development.

Key features of the programme include:

- Specialist support for early years practitioners through evidence-based toolkits.
- One-to-one guidance from a dedicated

speech and language therapist, working in partnership with the early years advisory team.

- Training and advice sessions, along with cluster support for practitioners.

The programme empowers early years settings to develop a deep understanding of communication and language development, ensuring that children are better prepared for their future educational journeys.

An independent evaluation of the programme's first two years by ImpactEd Evaluation demonstrated significant progress in children's speech and language skills.

First year (312 children screened):

- 40% of children were initially placed in the "red" category (significantly behind in speech and language skills), but this dropped to 27% by their final assessment.
- The "amber" category reduced from 36% to 23%.
- 50% of children achieved age-appropriate speech and language skills after a year of intervention.

Second year (580 children screened):

- 34% were categorised as "red" at their first screening, but this fell to just 14%.
- The "amber" group decreased from 28% to 15%.
- 71% of children were assessed as "green," indicating age-appropriate speech and language skills.

Children from English as an Additional Language (EAL) backgrounds and those eligible for Early Years Pupil Premium funding showed particularly strong progress.

The evaluation also highlighted the programme's impact on early years practitioners, who reported greater confidence in:

- Identifying speech, language, and communication difficulties among children.
- Delivering targeted support to meet individual needs.

Practitioners credited the dedicated training, resources, and collaboration with speech and language therapists for their improved ability to address communication challenges effectively.

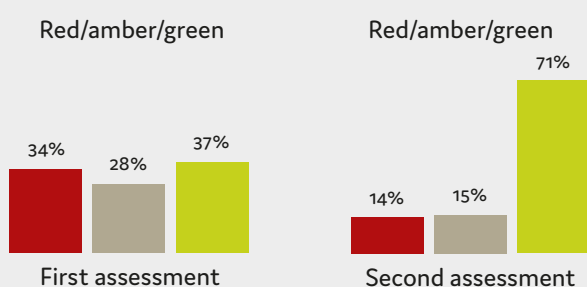
The **Language for Life** programme continues to grow, with a clear focus on expanding its reach and building upon the successes of its pilot phase. By fostering collaboration among local partners and investing in evidence-based strategies, the programme is making a measurable difference in children's speech and language development—and their future educational outcomes.

See more: [Language for Life - Making a Difference Together](#)

IMPROVEMENT IN CHILDREN'S COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE SKILLS

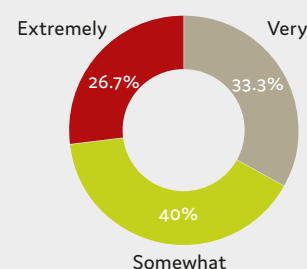
Results for children and settings taking part in Language for Life in 2022-2023:

Percentage of children in different risk categories – 580 children



Practitioners' confidence in

identifying communication issues:



AllChild

By AllChild

AllChild seeks to help children and young people build the social, emotional, and academic skills they need to flourish. They provide a **tailored, place-based approach to identify the children most in need of opportunity, with the aim of preventing crises**. Solutions are then designed and led by the people, organisations and support systems already established in their community.

AllChild has supported thousands of children and young people to flourish, with measurable improvements in their social, emotional, and academic wellbeing.

AllChild, formerly West London Zone, began in 2016, focusing their work on the communities of greatest need. They found that despite children and young people in these communities having

multiple, interrelated needs such as poor attendance and wellbeing concerns, none of these children were at the threshold to qualify for additional statutory support. Beginning with the London boroughs of Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, Brent and Westminster, as of September 2024, AllChild has expanded to serve the communities of Leigh, Atherton and Tyldesley in Wigan.

AllChild is an organisation that aspires to effect change at a national level. They aim to achieve this through **two key approaches**:

- 1 Working in new geographies and sharing learnings from this process.
- 2 To develop their political networks to influence change and make the case for a co-designed, local model of support.

AllChild measures the following people-led outcomes on its Impact Programmes:

- % of children at risk in peer relationships
- % of children at risk in emotional wellbeing
- % of children at risk of low confidence
- % of children on track to meet age-related expectations in English/ Reading
- % of children on track to meet age-related expectations in Maths
- % of children that are persistent absent
- % of children engaged with Children's Services

On a community level, their aim is to help create a local system wherein families, schools, communities and the wider system work together more effectively to produce positive outcomes for children and families.

Looking at AllChild's expansion to Wigan, there is plenty to learn from their operating model. Following Wigan Borough Council's interest in partnership with AllChild, they began a process of programme co-design, which included consultation workshops with children, families and voluntary sector organisations. These reinforced the need for support to children's emotional wellbeing at home, school and in the community. In order to implement this programme, AllChild have appointed a Regional Director, who was responsible for establishing relationships with partner schools and recruiting a team of ten Link Workers. They have now identified ten delivery partners to provide additional support. A key role of the Regional Director has been to develop links with community organisations and local authority services in which Link Workers can link families to.

With each partner school they've identified, they subsequently identify 30-40 children who would most benefit from holistic support. This is done with data drawn from the school and local authority, supplemented with additional surveys. These children are then enrolled on Impact Programmes, led by trusted adults or 'Link Workers' who are based in the school of each child they work with. They guide, support and champion each child and are responsible for the design and facilitation of a two-year programme with them, their families and their teachers. Within this programme, they seek to bring together the relevant specialist support for children at the right time, involving the local authority, charities, schools, families and funders.

AllChild is backed by a collective funding model, which incorporates:

- 3 Major donors (27%)
- 4 Central government contributions alongside local commissioners (21%)
- 5 Grants from Trusts and Foundations (18%)
- 6 Commissioners paying on each child achieving milestones (12%)
- 7 Lead commissioners paying on each child achieving milestones (10%)
- 8 Partnerships and donations from local and national organisations/ corporations (7%)
- 9 Private commissioners paying on each child achieving milestones (5%)

One of the main challenges they face is collaborating with governmental departments working in silos. Another limitation relating to the commissioning income stream is that they are only paid upon successful evidence of impact against a maximum of three outcomes as selected by the commissioning authority e.g. a reduction of % of children at risk in emotional wellbeing.

At a child-level, they have **greatly increased outcomes post-intervention, including:**

- 10 81% of children at risk in peer relationships improved.
- 11 86% of children at risk in emotional wellbeing improved.
- 12 69% of children at risk of low confidence improved.
- 13 71% of children on track to meet age-related expectations in English/ Reading improved.
- 14 65% of children on track to meet age-related expectations in Maths improved.

There are a range of external learning projects and evaluations that have been undertaken and are underway, using a range of qualitative and quantitative methods. These include: UCL Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities, Nesta, CFEY and Shift.

In regards to community-level impact, through evaluation by ATQ consultants, AllChild was able to evidence **an £81k per child average in savings to the state and/or wider economic benefit, modelled on 500 children in Brent, based on past outcomes achieved.**

Coram Impact and Evaluation are the commissioned Learning Partner for AllChild's expansion of their programme to Wigan. The learning partnership will include an evaluation looking at the implementation and emerging outcomes of the programme, which is designed to identify and support children at risk of negative outcomes through trained Link Workers based in schools.

Coram are working with AllChild and partners to develop a theory of change and an outcome framework which will underpin our evaluation for the programme. Their approach includes using methods such as qualitative stakeholder interviews and a series of creative qualitative evaluation sessions run with participating children, as well as analysis of participant outcome data collected by AllChild and administrative data from Wigan Council. The evaluation will follow a participatory approach working with a team of young (16 to 18 years) Peer Researchers, who will play a fundamental role in co-producing the evaluation and ensuring the evaluation is child centred. Coram plan to produce a number of learning outputs for a variety of audiences over the course of the learning partnership, the first of which will be published in spring 2025.

30-40

CHILDREN ARE
IDENTIFIED FOR SUPPORT
IN EACH PARTNER SCHOOL



Upstream England

By [Centrepont](#), a registered charity

Centrepont is the UK's leading youth homelessness charity. Alongside their partners, they support almost 14,000 young people every year and are campaigning to end youth homelessness by 2037.

They are tackling youth homelessness through [Upstream England](#), **a school-based prevention programme designed to identify and support young people aged 11–16 who are at hidden risk of homelessness.** Drawing inspiration from successful initiatives like the Geelong Project in Australia, Upstream Cymru, and research from Cardiff University, this pilot programme operates within secondary schools across England to deliver targeted, evidence-based interventions.

Upstream England utilises an internationally evaluated digital survey, [Upstream digital survey](#), to identify young people at risk of homelessness. By analysing responses, the programme pinpoints individuals who may be facing hidden challenges that place them at a heightened risk of becoming homeless in the future. The programme then partners with local organisations to deliver **tailored support, which includes:**

- Family mediation and support
- Holistic health interventions
- Homelessness prevention education, including support for parents and caregivers

These interventions are driven by a psychologically informed approach, designed to address the unique needs of each young person and their school community.

The initial pilot focuses on secondary school students aged 11–16 who are not in care but are identified as having a higher risk of homelessness. These students are often overlooked within their school and local communities because their

risk factors are not immediately visible. **Risk indicators include:**

- Sleeping away from home
- Underperforming or disengaging at school
- Involvement in offending behaviours
- Being "hidden but at heightened risk"

Research highlights the importance of this approach. For example, a Welsh study of over 800 young people found that more than 60% of those identified as at risk of homelessness showed little or no signs of school disengagement, reinforcing the need for a nuanced approach to identifying and supporting these young people.

Schools play a pivotal role in the success of Upstream England. As safe and familiar spaces, schools offer a unique opportunity to engage with young people who may be struggling. Students complete the Upstream survey in the classroom, and the subsequent support is tailored to meet the needs of both the individual student and the wider school community.

By partnering closely with schools, the programme ensures that interventions are embedded within existing support structures, making it easier to address challenges early and effectively. Schools are essential collaborators, helping to shape and refine the prevention approach while creating an environment that supports vulnerable students.

Centrepont's vision for Upstream England is to build a robust evidence base that supports the expansion of effective interventions. By starting with small-scale pilots, the programme aims to develop a scalable model that can be implemented more broadly as additional funding and support are secured.

The ultimate goal is to break the cycle of youth homelessness for future generations through early intervention, local partnerships, and tailored support strategies.

See more: [Pre 16 prevention pilots](#)



Reimagining pre-proceedings

By [Family Rights Group](#), a registered charity

A **15-month pilot project** led by the **Family Rights Group**, a leading specialist child welfare charity, is set to launch in Dorset, aiming to transform how families at risk of care proceedings are supported. This initiative is part of the charity's wider '**Reimagining Pre-Proceedings**' project, funded by the **Legal Education Foundation**, and builds on lessons from the [Care Crisis Review](#) and reports from the [Public Law Working Group](#).

The Dorset pilot seeks to 'create the conditions for families to get the help they and their children need at an earlier stage,' preventing the need for care proceedings wherever possible. By focusing on **early intervention** and fostering collaborative partnerships, the pilot will bring together families, social workers, the local Family Court, and other key partners to promote positive outcomes for children.

The Dorset pilot aims to drive system change in pre-proceedings work by:

- Ensuring families can understand and address social workers' concerns while having their voices heard.
- Equipping practitioners with the tools and confidence to work collaboratively with families, incorporating their insights and lived experiences.
- Promoting effective partnership working between families, social workers, local authorities, and the judiciary.
- Demonstrating how early, coordinated interventions can safely avert care proceedings.

The work in Dorset includes:

- 1 Co-produced legal and practice programme for the judiciary:
 - Designed in collaboration with families and delivered in partnership with the [Magistrates Association](#) and [Judicial College](#).
- 2 Focused local pilots:
 - In two family justice areas, the pilot will emphasise early and effective partnership working with families.
 - Practitioners will gain deeper insight into families' experiences of the child welfare and family justice systems.
- 3 Engagement with key stakeholders:
 - Collaboration with directors, service managers, judges, magistrates, and other decision-makers to identify what is working well and what needs improvement.
 - Peer learning and cross-disciplinary activities to drive systemic change.
- 4 Accessible resources for families:
 - Tailored advice materials, including easy-read versions of the Public Law Working Group's best practice guidance, to ensure families are informed and supported.
- 5 Evaluation and dissemination:
 - Independent evaluation led by Caroline Thomas, Honorary Research Fellow at the [University of Stirling](#), will assess the approach and its impact.
 - Resources and findings from the pilot will be shared widely, allowing adaptation and adoption by other local agencies and family justice partnerships.

The pilot will begin with families, social workers, and other stakeholders in the local family justice area collaborating to identify strengths and areas for improvement in Dorset's current

systems. These insights will shape a more effective, family-centred approach.

Initial feedback from stakeholders highlights the importance of early intervention. **Cathy Ashley**, Chief Executive of Family Rights Group, stated:

"At a time when record numbers of children are in the care system, the Dorset pilot presents a unique opportunity to help safely avert the need for care proceedings by supporting the child welfare and family justice system to deliver early, effective partnership working with children and families."

The urgency of this pilot is underscored by the growing number of children in care. According to the charity [Become](#), as of March 2023, more than **83,840 children in England** were in care – the highest number on record.

Theresa Leavy, Executive Director for People – Children, at Dorset Council, welcomed the pilot, saying:

"We are delighted to be the pilot area, and at the forefront of positive change which will help to shape the best support possible for children and families in Dorset. We are looking forward to working within the broader systems our families experience, boosting collaboration, focusing on people's strengths, and restoring relationships."

See more: [Reimagining pre-proceedings](#)



83,840

83,840 CHILDREN IN ENGLAND WERE IN CARE IN MARCH 2023 - THE HIGHEST NUMBER ON RECORD



Family Hubs Networks

By [Lancashire County Council](#)

Lancashire, a large and diverse local authority comprising 12 districts, faced the challenge of establishing **Family Hubs** without direct funding from the Department for Education (DfE). Instead, the focus was placed on **leveraging existing networks, services, and partnerships to create a more cohesive, joined-up approach to meeting local family needs.**

Building on existing strengths

Lancashire utilised its already well-established **Early Help offer** and strong local networks as a foundation for developing Family Hubs. The commitment and collaboration of local partners and services played a crucial role in the early success of this initiative.

Engagement and collaboration

The team worked closely with all 12 district councils as well as the community, voluntary, and faith sectors, recognising their deep knowledge of and connections within local communities. Regular engagement and communication with strategic partners ensured alignment with the Family Hub model framework.

User-centred design

User research was undertaken to shape the vision for Lancashire's Family Hubs, focusing on the needs of children, young people, and families. This process was

guided by DfE standards, with Lancashire drawing on insights from other local authorities that had received funding.

Service mapping

A comprehensive mapping exercise was conducted to identify service delivery across the districts. Using a tool designed to meet the Annex F service expectations, this process highlighted gaps in provision and areas of good practice, enabling the network to address local needs more effectively.

The work was underpinned by the following key principles:

- **Access:** Ensuring that virtual and outreach services are easy to access and understandable for families at a local level.
- **Connections:** Bringing professionals, services, and providers together through co-location, information sharing, shared outcomes, and collaborative governance.
- **Relationships:** Strengthening families by addressing underlying issues and fostering improved relationships between families and services, creating a sense of community investment in local provision.

Lancashire's Family Hub Networks have **achieved significant milestones:**

- **Increased engagement:** Footfall and attendance at group sessions have grown considerably, with many hubs becoming fully booked as multi-

agency partners deliver services from the hubs.

- **New partnerships:** Weekly collaborations and initiatives have enhanced the range of services available to families.
- **Enhanced online presence:** A growing website, social media, and Facebook presence promotes services and initiatives across the network, improving communication with families.

To track progress, Lancashire has developed a Family Hubs Performance Dashboard, which measures both qualitative and quantitative outcomes, including participation, reach, service quality, and customer satisfaction.

Lancashire now has 12 established **Family Hub Networks** and 29 operational hubs. Led by the **Early Help Service – Children and Family Wellbeing Service**, the programme is designed to evolve and grow over time, adapting to local needs and priorities.

Lancashire's experience highlights the importance of empowering local practitioners to explore, understand, and develop solutions tailored to their unique contexts. This freedom enables teams to effectively navigate the service expectations for Family Hubs and ensure that provision is responsive to local needs.

See more: [Lancashire Family Hubs Network](#)

Camden Young Pathways Finder

By [London Borough of Camden](#)

The **Camden Young Pathways Finder** project, launched by the **London Borough of Camden**, provided a **tailored programme of learning, enterprise skills, and employment opportunities for young Camden residents aged 19 to 25**. The initiative targeted those at risk of involvement in youth violence, exploitation, or violent crime, aiming to empower participants and open pathways to fulfilling and aspirational lives.

The Camden Young Pathways Finder programme sought to:

- Provide young people with opportunities to explore new career paths, develop essential skills, and broaden their horizons.
- Help participants escape cycles of poverty and violence by fostering independence and long-term employability.
- Create safe, supportive environments where participants could build confidence and develop meaningful goals for the future.

The programme offered a variety of hands-on experiences, workshops, and placements designed to develop key skills and prepare young people for employment. Partner organisations worked with Camden Council to provide high-quality placements and learning opportunities, supported by ongoing pastoral care.

A placement within the programme was designed to:

- Include enrichment activities to provide participants with an understanding of the organisation and its sector.
- Facilitate one-to-one meetings with senior professionals to offer career insights.
- Include workshops and short project challenges to develop communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills.
- Offer a few days or weeks of hands-on work experience within the organisation.
- Create opportunities for participants to gain insight into industry entry pathways.

Partner organisations played a key role in delivering the programme by offering:

- Short work experiences that provided participants with exposure to different industries.
- Paid work placements aligned with business objectives and participants' employability journeys.
- Learning opportunities for participants to develop new skills and explore new areas of interest.

The council supported both the participants and partner organisations by:

- Offering ongoing pastoral care to ensure participants felt supported throughout their placement.
- Acting as a point of contact for any queries or challenges.
- Helping organisations design engaging and inclusive experiences for young people, including in remote working environments.

Participants engaged in diverse learning experiences tailored to their interests and career aspirations. These included:

- **Enterprise – Pop-Up Business School**
Taught participants how to start a business without requiring a loan or formal business plan, focusing on practical, community-based start-up advice.
- **Construction Skills Courses**
Provided an introduction to the construction industry, covering basic skills such as plumbing, carpentry, and electrical installation.
- **Maths for Life Skills**
Helped participants improve their confidence in using maths in daily life, including understanding data, graphs, and other mathematical concepts.
- **Digital Illustration with Adobe**
A practical course teaching digital design skills using Adobe tools, enabling participants to create professional, imaginative collages.
- **IT Skills for the Office**
Offered foundational computer skills for roles in administration, reception, or secretarial work, with a focus on creating and editing documents in Word.
- **Understanding Project Management**
Introduced participants to the fundamentals of project management, covering planning, execution, and tools to manage change effectively.
- **Developing a Successful Business Plan**
Guided participants through writing a professional business plan, focusing on market strategy, branding, and presenting to investors.

The Camden Young Pathways Finder project delivered transformative opportunities for young people in the borough. By fostering confidence and employability, the programme empowered participants to create positive change in their lives.

The initiative also strengthened partnerships between Camden Council and local organisations, highlighting the value of collaboration in addressing social challenges and supporting vulnerable young people.

See more: [Camden Youth Pathways Finder](#)

"I've always had an interest in different sectors and professions, but never really knew how to get in the door - this project will help me develop skills, networks and learn what career is right for me."



Blocks

By [Salford Foundation](#), a registered charity

Blocks, delivered by Salford Foundation and commissioned by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, is a **1-to-1 mentoring programme designed to equip children aged 8 to 11 in North and East Manchester with the skills they need to transition to high school successfully**. By providing a safe, supportive, and engaging space, the programme empowers young people to build confidence, resilience, and key life skills for their future.

The Blocks programme pairs children with dedicated mentors based in local school communities. This allows mentors to provide consistent, tailored support both during structured sessions and in the children's daily school environment. These sessions run throughout the entire academic year, with additional support and activities offered during school holidays to help children apply their new skills in real-world settings.

The programme focuses on developing social, emotional, and personal skills through **targeted sessions covering key areas such as:**

- Confidence
- Self-esteem
- Managing difficult emotions
- Healthy relationships
- Coping strategies
- Planning for the transition to high school

Mentors work closely with children to foster trust, providing regular opportunities for them to learn, reflect, and grow in a safe and nurturing environment.

The Blocks curriculum is designed to help children explore four core areas of personal development:

My Identity:

- Focuses on self-awareness and understanding emotions.
- Builds self-esteem and teaches techniques for managing feelings effectively.
- Lays the foundation for understanding how external factors influence emotional health.

My Relationships:

- Helps children identify healthy and unhealthy relationships.
- Covers topics such as power dynamics, coercion, and red flags in relationships.
- Encourages discussions about positive role models and safe ways to express concerns.

My Environment:

- Encourages children to apply lessons about identity and relationships to their everyday environments (school, home, and community).
- Identifies safe spaces and people within those environments.
- Reinforces emotional health strategies in real-world contexts.

My Future:

- Guides children to think about their aspirations and set achievable goals.
- Focuses on applying what they've learned in the programme to overcome future challenges.

An external evaluation highlighted the programme's **success in driving positive outcomes for children:**

- Positive changes were observed in 7 out of 8 evaluation areas.
- The programme has been fully embraced by schools and is now embedded in local school communities.
- Mentors have successfully engaged some of the most vulnerable children in schools.
- Participating children reported significant improvements in their everyday lives.

Blocks extends its reach beyond term time with sessions in local communities and positive activities during school holidays. These additional opportunities enable children to practise and reinforce the skills they've learned, supporting long-term growth and resilience.

While Blocks is primarily focused on North and East Manchester, a smaller cohort of young people in Salford also benefits from the programme, ensuring its impact is felt across Greater Manchester.

Blocks demonstrates the value of combining mentorship, tailored personal development, and community engagement to support young people. By embedding the programme within schools, it ensures children receive consistent, trusted guidance while addressing the unique challenges of the transition to high school.

The programme has shown how early, targeted interventions can create lasting positive change for children, equipping them with the tools to thrive both now and in the future.

See more: [Blocks](#)



Art at the Start

By [The University of Dundee](#)

Art at the Start is a collaborative project between art therapist Vicky Armstrong and experimental psychologist Dr Josephine Ross, based at the University of Dundee. The project investigates the role of shared art experiences in fostering strong attachment relationships and promoting the social and emotional wellbeing of young children. **It explores key questions such as:**

- How does creating art together with a caregiver influence a child's attachment relationships?
- What measurable impact does art-making have on early childhood development and well-being?

The project aims to build an evidence base demonstrating how participation in the arts during early childhood can contribute to positive behavioural changes and improved family relationships.

The project began with the introduction of Create Together, a series of art therapy groups developed by Vicky Armstrong. These groups focused on supporting parents and infants to engage in shared art-making experiences. Parents reported stronger bonds with their children and noticeable improvements in their relationships.

To measure these outcomes more formally, Vicky collaborated with Dr Josephine Ross, and together they established Art at the Start. This phase of the project introduced formal evaluation methods, including video analysis, to observe changes in interactions between parents and children. The findings revealed improved well-being and an increase in behaviours that support positive attachment relationships.

In collaboration with [Dundee Contemporary Arts \(DCA\)](#), Art at the Start expanded its focus to examine the social benefits of shared art experiences for families. **The research included:**

- Studying families with young children participating in DCA's arts activities.

- Evaluating the effectiveness of arts psychotherapy interventions for families with vulnerable attachment relationships.
- Providing art resources to families at risk of low well-being for use at home.

The project also emphasised public engagement, encouraging as many children aged 0–3 as possible to participate in creative activities. Observational data showed clear behavioural changes among families, illustrating the positive impact of art-making on parent-infant relationships and emotional well-being.

This work was recognised through the Fantastic for Families Impact Award (2020) and the Family Learning Health and Wellbeing Award (2021), reflecting its significant contribution to supporting families with young children.

The next phase of Art at the Start focused on scaling up the model across Scotland, supported by funding from the [Arts and Humanities Research Council \(AHRC\)](#). The aim was to use cultural assets to address health inequalities, with a focus on infant mental health.

Key activities included:

- Partnering with new cultural organisations, including Tramway (Glasgow), Taigh Chearsabhagh (Uist), and Dunfermline Carnegie Libraries and Gallery, alongside the original collaboration with DCA.
- Embedding art therapists within these sites to deliver parent-infant art therapy services.

- Developing outreach initiatives to engage communities traditionally underrepresented in galleries and arts programmes.

Collaborations were also formed with NHS perinatal and infant mental health teams in Greater Glasgow and Clyde, Lothian, and Highland, as well as with the charity [Cross Reach](#), which adopted the parent-infant art therapy model within its services.

This phase was supported by partnerships with organisations such as the [National Museum of Scotland](#) and the [Fruitmarket Gallery](#), demonstrating the potential of cross-sector collaboration to support infant mental health and reduce inequalities.

The project's **success in creating positive outcomes** has led to continued work in several areas:

- The partnership with Cross Reach remains active, further expanding the use of parent-infant group models.
- The DCA continues to fund art therapy services in collaboration with the Tayside Infant Mental Health Team, ensuring ongoing support for families.
- The second phase of AHRC-funded work involves collaboration with arts organisations, third-sector services, the Scottish Government, NHS teams, art therapists, and academics to explore art-based approaches for supporting infant mental health and addressing inequalities.

See more: [Art at the Start](#)



Your Choice

By The Association of London Directors of Children's Services (ALDCS) sector-led improvement partnership – [London Innovation and Improvement Alliance](#)

Your Choice is a **high-intensity, goal-driven intervention designed to empower young people through Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), with a particular focus on Behavioural Activation**. Delivered by specially trained and supervised coaches, the programme helps young people better understand themselves, build resilience, and engage in meaningful, pro-social activities that support their well-being.

Launched as a pan-London initiative, Your Choice is a pioneering Violence Reduction Programme delivered across 31 London local authorities by adolescent safeguarding teams. It targets young people aged 11–18 who are at risk of contextual harm, equipping practitioners with psychologically informed CBT tools and techniques to promote safety and positive choices.

The Your Choice programme adopts a public health approach to help break cycles of violence and harm while complementing systemic work already undertaken by local authorities.

Its core objectives include:

- Empowering young people to focus on what matters to them and providing practical tools and resources to help them achieve their goals.
- Bridging a critical gap in practice by moving beyond understanding the causes of harmful behaviours to offering actionable strategies that help young people protect themselves.
- Contributing to evidence-based practice through participation in the London Young People Study (LYPS), advocating for further investment in violence reduction programmes.



The programme also seeks to reduce violence and criminalisation among adolescents, support their return to education, training, and employment (ETE), and improve their overall well-being and relationships.

The Your Choice programme has already **delivered significant positive outcomes**:

- Young people report feeling happier, more positive, and purposeful.
- Improved relationships and better understanding of themselves.
- Supported young people back into ETE.
- Frequent sessions have led to better engagement and finding young people's passions.
- Clinical supervision has provided personal and professional development for coaches and led to cost savings due to reduced placement costs.

The Your Choice programme has **highlighted several lessons for successful implementation**:

- Ongoing supervision is critical for supporting practitioners, offering fresh perspectives, and sustaining their motivation.
- Actively involving young people in purposeful activities leads to stronger engagement and better outcomes.

To ensure robust measurement of its impact, the programme is undergoing a Cluster Randomised Control Trial (RCT), with evaluation running until December 2024. The final Efficacy Report is scheduled for release in August 2025.

The evaluation approach is carefully monitored to prevent the RCT from distorting practice or limiting young people's access to services. This rigorous methodology aims to establish a comprehensive evidence base, positioning the Your Choice programme as an example of best practice for national and international violence reduction efforts.

See more: [The London Young People Study](#)

A participant reflected on the transformative impact of the programme:

"Working with [my practitioner] really opened my eyes. I see now that who you surround yourself with makes an image of who you are."

EXODUS

By UpskillU Ltd. and the Youth Endowment Fund, a Charitable Trust

The Youth Endowment Fund exists to prevent children and young people becoming involved in violence. Upskill U is a training and consultancy firm that specialises in solutions for supporting organization working with vulnerable people.

EXODUS, delivered by UpskillU and funded by the Youth Endowment Fund, was a **12-month mentoring programme designed to prevent young people from becoming involved in violence and exploitation**. Targeted at those who were involved, affected by, or at risk of violence, the programme provided a comprehensive support framework through restorative approaches and therapeutic interventions.

EXODUS begins with a 12-week intensive one-to-one mentoring phase, delivered by paid mentors from diverse cultural backgrounds. These mentors, trained in restorative practice, work closely with young people to build trust, address challenges, and create a foundation for personal growth.

Following the initial phase, participants enter a transitional phase focused on setting long-term goals and fostering personal development. Upon completing the programme, young people are connected with local community volunteers, forming an extended support network to sustain their progress.

EXODUS stood out as a flagship intervention due to its co-designed approach. Young people, experts with lived experience, and industry professionals collaborated to develop a programme that addressed the unique challenges faced by at-risk youth.

What makes EXODUS unique is its **integration of restorative approaches with a range of therapeutic models, including:**

- Strengths-based and trauma-informed approaches to empower participants and acknowledge their lived experiences.
- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and motivational interviewing to encourage positive behavioural change.
- Mental skills training to build resilience and coping mechanisms.

The programme combines both prescriptive and developmental **elements to help participants explore key themes, such as:**

Self-identity: Understanding themselves and their strengths.

Attitudes and values: Reflecting on personal beliefs and their influence on behaviour.

Risks and consequences: Recognising the impact of choices and actions.

Conflict and choices: Developing strategies for managing conflict constructively.

Influences and decisions: Identifying external pressures and making informed decisions.

EXODUS incorporates multiple strands to support participants holistically:

- Restorative mentoring to build trust and address personal challenges.
- Group work to encourage peer support and shared learning.
- Systemic family therapy to address family dynamics and foster healthy relationships.
- Restorative justice conferencing to repair harm and rebuild trust.
- Meditation to promote relaxation and mental well-being.

The programme begins with an intensive period of intervention, during which participants' progress was assessed through a "distance travelled" evaluation. This informs the creation of tailored long-term support plans for each young person, ensuring that their individual needs are met effectively.

Upon completion of the mentoring and transitional phases, participants are introduced to a network of **community volunteers** who provide ongoing support. This extended network helps to reinforce the skills and strategies learned during the programme, empowering young people to continue making positive choices in their lives.

With funding from the Youth Endowment Fund, **Coram will evaluate EXODUS through a randomised controlled trial (RCT)**. An internal pilot will recruit 100 young people before August 2024 and will run until December 2024 before progressing to a full efficacy trial with 800 young people concluding in July 2026. The primary focus of the evaluation is to assess whether young people who receive EXODUS have different offending rates to young people who receive the usual support in youth offending, custody and community safety services.

The trial will recruit young people in Milton Keynes, Haringey and Northamptonshire through three referral partners: Northamptonshire Police and Youth Justice Service, Haringey Council and Youth Justice Service, and Oakhill Secure Training Centre. As part of the research, Coram has trained a group of peer researchers who have experienced the EXODUS programme to support with the engagement of young people in the trial.

Hannah Lawrence, research manager at Coram and principal investigator, said: "We are delighted to be selected by the Youth Endowment Fund to work with UpskillU to evaluate its EXODUS mentoring programme. Coram is at the forefront of developing solutions that offer children and young people a better future and it is essential to build an evidence base on what works for young people who are at risk of offending and youth violence to ensure they receive the right support. This evaluation builds on Coram's experience of delivering randomised controlled trials in the social care sector and the insight gained will help to shape future services to reduce youth violence and offending."

See more: [Exodus Programme: Restorative therapeutic intervention](#)

The Coram Institute for Children

The Coram Institute for Children is the first dedicated think tank combining recognised research capability with policy insight and innovation, story-telling and practice development and to be grounded in the views and direct delivery experience of children and young people.

We work to foster evidence-based solutions to the challenges facing us by providing a platform for partnership, capacity building and improvement to realise the goals. The principles underpinning the work are to realise the goals of the Charter for Children of A Fair Share of resources for children, An Equal Chance irrespective of who they are or where they live and A Secure Future with the stability relationships and support they need with access to justice to uphold their rights.

National recognition

The Coram Institute board is chaired by Ade Adetosoye, CEO of Bromley and SOLACE spokesperson on children and includes extensive research and multi-disciplinary practice leadership expertise.

Andrew Ireland is the former Director of Children and Adult Services in Kent whilst Professor Jonathan Portes of Kings College London chairs the Research and Ethics committee. Dr Judith Trowel specialises in child and adolescent mental health and Professor Sir Ivor Crewe, former Vice Chancellor of the University of Essex, is the former President of the British Academy of Social Sciences.

Academy of Social Science.

We have established strategic partnerships with the University of Newcastle's Centre for Research Excellence in Youth and with University College London's London Office and Policy Lab. Directed by Dr Carol Homden CBE, we are now concluding a two year development programme, and working to achieve recognition as an Independent Research Organisation.

City St George's University is the first university member of the Coram Institute's Innovation Incubator joining the founder members of Hertfordshire, North Yorkshire, Havering and Bromley, EY and Microsoft as well as associate members Barnardo's and Grosvenor in championing and pioneering cross-sectoral innovations

All the material in this Innovation Collective reports are accessible to all through the [Innovation Play Book](#) and the Annual Innovation Forum provides an exceptional opportunity to catalyse the distributed community of change-makers to share and exchange learning on what works.

Supported by the Hadley Trust, Coram Institute is the knowledge partner to the Churchill Fellowship and is pioneering the design-thinking Inset programme to enable and support innovation capacity-building in children's services as part of the Innovation Incubator.

The independent policy-ready research, young people's campaigns and public programme will complement the work of organisations dedicated to the welfare of children and add unique value as the only dedicated *think and do centre* for children.

Active research

Led by the Managing Director, Max Stanford, our Centre for Impact conducts mixed methods research and evaluation with Government Departments, What Works Centres, local authorities, NHS Trusts, sector charities and community organisations. We specialise in impact studies and participatory approaches, which combine the voice of the child with robust research techniques and work with dedicated policy specialists in each key thematic area of our work and Masters and co-supervised Doctoral researchers.

The specialism in peer and participatory research methods is further strengthened by the Youth Insight researchers, currently addressing complex identities and digital consumer behaviour.

Key themes and areas for research and development

- Childcare and family support
- Securing wellbeing
- Increasing stability and securing permanence
- Tackling social and school exclusion
- Mobility and migration
- Participation and practice
- Data, diagnostics and results

The Randomised Control Trial on Family Group Conferencing conducted by Coram for Foundations has already provided the evidential base leading to the mandating of Family Group Decision Making in law.

Recent work by Coram Institute include complex identities, foster care sufficiency, systemic family therapy as well as the All Child programme evaluation, examination of the drivers of homelessness for 16 and 17 year olds and the Violence Reduction Unit's Community Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Support programme included in this report.

The Coram International team of socio-legal researchers led by Professor Dame Carolyn Hamilton works with governments around the world, as well as UNICEF New York and multiple partners to inform and inspire realisation of children's rights set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and support the Sustainable Development Goals.

It brings international perspective to addressing collective challenges and a recent seven country study assessed the progress of de-institutionalisation in Eastern Europe and the development of the international guide to making Digital Safety Laws.

See more: [Coram Institute for Children](#)

VRU Community Mental Health and Emotional Well-being Support Pilot

By The Coram Institute for Children

Good mental health and emotional well-being are key factors in the lives of parents, and those with significant caring responsibilities, and at the heart of parenting and supporting young people. Recognising this, the [Mayor of London's Violence Reduction Unit \(VRU\)](#) undertook a wide-ranging consultation to understand the needs of parents/carers in London.

Supporting a whole-family approach to reducing violence, the VRU identified a gap in the provision of culturally competent, community-based, mental health support services for parents/carers in underserved communities.

Addressing this gap in service provision, the VRU co-designed the Community-Based Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being Support Pilot with parents and carers, young people, and a range of stakeholders across the voluntary, community and statutory sectors. The VRU commissioned two grassroots organisations to deliver the pilot services across separate sites:

Groundwork's 'Strengthening Families' programme aimed to provide support to parents/carers of young people aged 11-24, to understand and manage their young person's well-being and challenging behaviour. The programme included peer support groups, skills-building workshops, and 1:1 support. The [Midaye 'Hope'](#) project also aimed to support parents/carers of young people, through 1:1, group and peer-to-peer support.

Coram carried out an **independent evaluation** of the pilot services, involving interviews, focus groups, surveys and analysis of service monitoring data.

They found that parents/carers in both services reported positive impacts on their well-being, including:

- Increased confidence and self-esteem
- Increased self-compassion
- Increased feelings of happiness
- Reduced stress, anxiety and isolation
- Improved ability to recognise and manage mental health issues in themselves and their children

Services supported parents'/carers' relationships with their children: building on parenting strategies, improving communication and focusing on children's positive behaviours. While not a focus of our evaluation, we found evidence of improved child outcomes, including improved family relationships and open communication, as well as improved school-related outcomes such as a reduction in school behaviour sanctions and an increase in attendance.

Additionally, the pilot services were seen to:

- Improve the perception of and access to other (statutory) support services
- Help parents/carers to meet, share experiences, and develop relationships with other parents/carers.

The **practitioner briefing** focuses on learning from the pilot for practitioners, particularly those supporting the mental health and emotional well-being of service users in minoritised and marginalised communities. **They highlight the following best practice:**

A relationship- and person-centred approach

- Build trust by treating service users with respect, empathy and compassion.
- Adopt informal communication styles.
- Be professional: responsive, proactive and follow through with

commitments.

- Offer flexibility, tailor services to individual needs, and empower service users to make decisions about the support they receive.

Cultural competency

- Recruit staff from the communities being served and with lived experience of the challenges service users are facing to increase understanding and relatability.
- Offer services in users' native languages to enable those without English proficiency to fully participate.
- Understand, respect and honour the cultures and values of the communities being served.

Community-led, empowering and holistic services

- Allow service users to share what they want and need from the service
- Support service users to form peer networks to create wide and sustainable support
- Encourage service users to play an active role through participatory services and voluntary and paid roles to build capacity within the community and to ensure the service is user-led.

[Read the full evaluation report here](#)

[Read the full practitioners' briefing here](#)

"I found [the Innovation Forum] a really inspiring event, and I returned to my day job the next day full of ideas to take forward."



**INCREASED
CONFIDENCE AND
SELF-ESTEEM**



**REDUCED STRESS,
ANXIETY AND
ISOLATION**



**IMPROVED ABILITY TO
RECOGNISE AND MANAGE
MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES
IN THEMSELVES AND
THEIR CHILDREN**

The Door is *Still* Closed

By The Coram Institute for Children



In 2014, the study 'The Door is Closed', examined the advocacy case work of Coram Voice. They found that children were being allowed to become or remain homeless because local authorities were failing to give them the support they are legally entitled to.

Published in 2024, 'The Door is Still Closed', found that little progress has been made in the past decade. Examination of legal rulings, case work and published reports shows that all too many homeless 16- and 17-year-olds are still being left unassessed, unsafe and denied the support and security that vulnerable children need.

Statutory guidance and case law* are clear that homeless 16- and 17-year-olds should receive a child in need assessment under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 and subsequently if found in need, owed a duty to be care housed under section 20 of the same Act. This entitles them to the care and protection afforded to children in care until 18-years-old and then to support as a care leaver until the age of 25.

The report found seven barriers to children receiving the support they are entitled to:

- 1 Wrong legislation:** A large number of 16- and 17-year-olds who become homeless are not assessed or are housed under the wrong legislation (the Housing Act 1996) with no practical or financial support from children's social care services until the age of 25.
- 2 Gatekeeping:** Local authorities are continuing to gatekeep and 'wait out the clock' until children turn 18, at which point the local authority has less responsibility for them if not deemed a care leaver.
- 3 Unsafe accommodation:** Vulnerable 16- and 17-year-olds are being housed in unsuitable and unsafe accommodation including adult hostels, unregulated or under-supervised provision. Children reported feeling scared, with one child going to a hospital to find somewhere safe to sleep. There was also clear evidence of adultification and a lack of recognition of the vulnerability of 16- and 17-year-olds.
- 4 Inaccurate information:** Many homeless 16- and 17-year-olds are not being given accurate information and are forced to make uninformed decisions that will have a huge impact on their lives. Children said they felt manipulated and misled.
- 5 Inadequate advocacy:** Children are navigating the complexities of the

different support options without consistent advice and advocacy (and in some cases legal advice) leaving children to make decisions which they later regretted. Advocate support was found to play a significant role in positive outcomes for homeless children.

- 6 Incomplete data:** National data on homeless 16- and 17-year-olds is incomplete, making it difficult to understand how well children's needs are being met and hold services to account in fulfilling their obligations in law.
- 7 No early help:** Vital early support to families that could help prevent many children from becoming homeless in the first place is missing. Many 16- and 17-year-olds who contributed to the report faced harrowing family situations of physical and emotional abuse, alcohol and substance misuse, financial difficulties and mental health issues resulting in family breakdown and homelessness.

In response to the findings, Coram makes a number of recommendations to ensure homeless 16- and 17-year-olds can access the care and support that they are entitled to. Fundamental to this is that homeless 16- and 17-year-olds have access to an independent advocate in line with the 1989 Children Act. Coram has calculated that it would **cost just £5m per annum to ensure that no 16- or 17-year-old child facing homelessness stands alone without an advocate.**



The main recommendations are:

- **The right legislation:** Local authorities should ensure that the default is to accommodate homeless children under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 in all but exceptional cases.
- **No gatekeeping:** Local authority children's services should have the resources to complete assessments within set timescales and offer support where and when children present as homeless.
- **Safe accommodation:** Local authorities should ensure they have sufficient safe and suitable accommodation and support for homeless 16- and 17-year-olds as well as listen to the voice of the child.
- **Access to accurate information:** The government should produce a child friendly version of the statutory guidance to explain what to expect when you become homeless and the rights and entitlements of homeless 16- and 17-year-olds.
- **Access to advocacy:** Local authority advocacy contracts should include a proactive (opt-out) offer of advocacy for homeless 16/17-year-olds.
- **Improve data:** The government should collect and publish local authority level data on the number of 16- and 17-year-olds who present as homeless.
- **Early support:** Increased investment in early help and prevention including evidence-based parenting, drug and alcohol misuse, and family conflict programmes to prevent family breakdown and homelessness in 16- and 17-year-olds.

*Southwark Judgement (2017) court ruling that denial of assessments by local authorities is unlawful (Essex 2019): www.childlawadvice.org.uk/information-pages/homelessness/

Read the full report here: <https://www.coram.org.uk/resource/the-door-is-still-closed/>

One young person interviewed for the report said:

"When I had my meeting where it was my homelessness officer, my social workers and me, I just wish I had an independent advocate there because I was stressed. I was not in the best mentally healthy place and I have... problems with comprehension skills, like understanding how people are talking to me, understanding the writing in front of me, it all confuses me. So ... I just wish that someone was there to just talk, talk on my side more and ... explain things to me better so that I could have made the better decisions sooner."

Dr Carol Homden, CEO of Coram, said:

"Vulnerable 16- and 17-year-olds who become homeless are almost always fleeing abuse and family breakdown. They not only need a roof over their head but the care and support that is their right under the Children Act 1989. It is disappointing to see that a decade on from Coram Voice's study, we are still not acting. Coram calls for investment of £5m to resource local authorities to ensure every child in this situation has an independent advocate to address the barriers and ensure they get access to the support to which they are entitled. Now is the time to change so that a decade from now this same report does not need to be written again."



Chapter 6

Achieving stability for children in care and care leavers

Ensuring stability for children in care and care leavers is essential to providing them with the security, support, and opportunities needed to thrive. This chapter explores initiatives designed to create lasting, loving homes for children in care and ensure that young people leaving the system receive the guidance, resources, and networks they need to navigate adulthood successfully.

From multidisciplinary approaches that enhance adoption support to employment models for care leavers, this chapter highlights pioneering efforts to improve experiences and outcomes for care-experienced young people.

60	Comfort Cases
60	Step Up Family Finding
61	Sibling Time
62	Creative Mentoring
63	Family Business Model
64	Exploring Innovations in Transition to adulthood study (EXIT)
65	Preparing for Adulthood
65	Next Venture Fund for Care Leavers
66	Local House Projects
67	Extending Shared Lives to Care Leavers
68	Children and Young People with Experience of Care
72	A National Voice Awards
74	Bright Spots programme
75	Hull's Bright Spots journey
76	How you can innovate further



Multidisciplinary approaches to adoption assessment and support processes

By [Adoption England](#)

Adoption England, funded by the [Department for Education](#), launched a **two-year programme to develop multidisciplinary and multiagency approaches to improve adoption assessment and support services**. This initiative aimed to enhance the experiences of adopted children and their families by fostering collaboration between local authorities, Integrated Care Boards, and other key stakeholders.

Adopted children often face complex challenges stemming from early adversity and trauma, including experiences of abuse, neglect, domestic violence, and instability. These factors can result in multifaceted support needs that traditional children's mental health

services, designed around diagnosable conditions, may struggle to meet.

Findings from the [evaluation of Adoption Support Fund \(2022\)](#) highlighted the extent of these needs:

- Mental health and wellbeing challenges among adopted children aged 5 to 15 were significantly greater than those of their peers (measured by the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire).
- Clinical or borderline needs were identified in 80% of children aged 1.5–5 years and 90% of those aged 6 to 18 years (measured by the Child Behaviour Checklist).

Addressing these needs requires the expertise of multiple disciplines and services to create a holistic and tailored support framework.

Adoption England has supported the development of seven regional projects designed to create collaborative models for adoption support.

These projects aim to:

- Provide timely specialist assessments and care pathways within the NHS.
- Build partnerships with Virtual Schools to improve adopted children's educational experiences.
- Create regional multiagency models to support larger groups of adopted children and families.
- Address the mental and physical health needs of adopted children through integrated services.
- Share expertise across sectors to better support adoptive families.

Each project explores innovative ways to deliver multidisciplinary and multiagency models, with the goal of creating lasting partnerships between health, education, and adoption services. The programme is being independently evaluated to share learning across the sector.

Regional Projects

North East

A collaboration between Adopt North East, Adoption Tees Valley, Adopt Coast to Coast, and the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board. The project established a multidisciplinary team to support children aged 4–11 with neurodiversity, attachment, or trauma-related behaviours. The focus was on improving education, peer relationships, and home life outcomes.

Adopt South

Partnering with Southampton University, Adopt South created a multidisciplinary service to provide holistic and timely support for families. The initiative included reflective supervision spaces, staff workshops, and a library of resources such as podcasts and films to share knowledge across teams working with pre- and post-order families.

North West

A collaboration between Adoption Counts, Adoption Now, Together for Adoption, Adoption in Merseyside, and Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool. This project developed a regional multiagency model offering assessment, therapeutic CAMHS services, and occupational therapy for children with sensory processing needs. The programme also included educational psychology services for families.

Adoption East Midlands

In partnership with Virtual Schools, Educational Psychology Services, and Nottinghamshire Youth Services, this project created a regional multidisciplinary team to assess and support families with complex needs, those at risk of family breakdown, and young people on the edge of care.

Adoption Partnership South East

This initiative expanded an existing

in-house therapeutic service across the region. By strengthening partnerships between social care, health, and education, the project improved understanding and service delivery for adopted children with complex needs.

One Adoption South Yorkshire

Partnering with the local Integrated Care Board, this project developed support for children affected by foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), including practical advice for parents and schools. A specialist protocol for assessments and education plans was introduced with the support of educational psychologists.

Adopt Thames Valley

In collaboration with Oxfordshire County Council ATTACH Team and Virtual Schools, this project created a multidisciplinary therapeutic team to support children with complex needs, including educational, psychological, and sensory integration challenges.

The programme is being evaluated by the [The Institute of Public Care \(IPC\) at Oxford Brookes University](#), in partnership with [Cardiff University](#) and the [University of East Anglia](#). The mixed-methods evaluation aims to assess the impact, benefits, and challenges of multidisciplinary approaches.

The evaluation will explore:

- The effectiveness of multidisciplinary models in meeting the needs of adopted children and families.
- The experiences of children and families receiving these services.
- The enablers and barriers to setting up integrated support services.

- The cost-benefit implications for organisations and the broader system of health, education, and family support.

Activities include longitudinal surveys of parents, interviews with staff and stakeholders, and secondary analysis of project data.

Comfort Cases

By [Comfort Cases UK](#), a registered charity

Comfort Cases UK, the UK branch of [Comfort Cases](#), **offers children entering the care system a specially curated backpack, known as a 'comfort case,' filled with essential and comforting items.** These bags are designed to give children a sense of ownership and security during one of the most traumatic transitions of their lives.

Each comfort case contains items such as books, pyjamas, toiletries, soft toys, blankets, and SIM cards for older children. These items not only meet practical needs but also provide emotional comfort, offering children a small but significant sense of normality and care during times of upheaval.

Care-experienced children often move multiple times a year, and four out of five children report having their

belongings transported in bin bags. This practice risks losing or damaging precious keepsakes, further compounding their sense of instability and loss.

Comfort Cases UK believes that no child should have to carry their life in a bin bag. These backpacks provide more than just physical items—they offer a sense of belonging, dignity, and care.

Comfort Cases UK partners with over 100 local authority teams, charities, NHS trusts, and residential care homes to distribute these backpacks to children in need. The charity relies on a network of dedicated volunteers who assemble the backpacks, ensuring each one is carefully filled with thoughtful and essential items.

The contents of a Comfort Case are tailored to meet the specific needs of children entering the care system, providing both practical necessities and items that bring comfort. These

backpacks are distributed to children transitioning into care, moving between foster homes, or being supported by organisations working with care-experienced young people.

In 2023, Comfort Cases made a significant impact across the United Kingdom and the United States:

- 31,500 Comfort Cases were distributed.
- 14,250 Comfort XLs (larger bags designed for older children or those with greater needs) were delivered.
- Volunteers contributed an impressive 12,520 hours of service, ensuring the initiative reached as many children as possible.

A Comfort Case is much more than a collection of items. It represents care, dignity, and support for children navigating the uncertainty of the care system. By providing a special bag for their belongings, Comfort Cases UK offers children a small sense of control and

Step Up Family Finding

By [Coram](#), a registered charity

Step Up, developed by Coram's Adoption Activity Days team and funded by Adoption England, aims **to reduce delays in finding adoptive families for children with priority characteristics—often referred to as 'harder to place' children.** This group includes children from minoritised ethnic backgrounds, sibling groups, children over five years old, and those with complex needs. These children often face longer family finding periods and are at greater risk of their adoption plans being changed if a match is not found within 12 months.

The Step Up programme offers a flexible and tailored package of intensive family finding services for a six-month period. **This bespoke support is designed to meet the specific needs of each child or sibling group and includes:**

- Funding for children to attend Adoption Activity Days.
- High-quality and dynamic profiling through professional videos and photographs of the child or sibling group.
- Therapeutic support, distinct from that provided under the Adoption Support Fund.

By using a personalised approach, Step Up enhances opportunities for children to be successfully matched with adoptive families, reducing delays and ensuring priority children are not left waiting unnecessarily.

During its first year, the programme received referrals for 24 children with priority characteristics, each at different stages in their family finding journey. Of these, 11 children had completed the full six-month programme by the time of evaluation, while the remaining 13 joined later in the year and had not yet completed their six months of support.

The evaluation highlighted several benefits of the programme:

- Children referred to Step Up were linked with a wider network of professionals and prospective adopters, significantly increasing their chances of finding a family.
- Referrals improved children's participation in Adoption Activity Days and Exchange Days, where positive outcomes included expressions of interest from prospective adopters.
- Step Up practitioners provided additional support to potential adoptive families, helping them make informed decisions and facilitating smoother progressions to adoption.

- The extra time and resources enabled experienced practitioners to work closely with family finders to assess adoptive families more efficiently and with greater confidence.

The evaluation made the following **recommendations for the next two years of the Step Up programme:**

Explore Step Up as a targeted offer to increase opportunities for children with a combination of priority characteristics, complex cases, experience of placement disruption or a lack of expressions of interest.

Consider the feasibility of increasing Step Up support from six months to 12, in line with the needs of the child.

Increase referrals specifically from children of Black African or Black Caribbean backgrounds in the next cohort.

Record outcomes of children who were not placed, or who were placed after the programme of support ended, to complete data.

[Read the full Coram Institute for Children evaluation report here.](#)

Sibling Time

By [Coram](#), a registered charity

Sibling Time, developed by the Coram Adoption Activity Days team, **provides a supportive and therapeutic environment for children in care or adopted to maintain meaningful contact with their siblings.** The programme is designed for children separated by care arrangements, including fostering, adoption, kinship care, and residential placements, enabling brothers and sisters to connect in a safe and enjoyable setting.

Children in care often face separation from their siblings due to placement arrangements. More than one-fifth of children in care feel they do not see their siblings often enough, with this figure rising among young people aged 11–18. Maintaining sibling connections is crucial, as research shows that good quality sibling contact is linked to better emotional well-being and long-term positive outcomes.

Sibling Time was created to address this need, ensuring that children and young people have opportunities to nurture these essential relationships, even when living apart.

Sibling Time offers local authorities a unique service that brings siblings together for fun, child-centred contact sessions. These sessions are tailored to

the needs of each family, creating a safe space where brothers and sisters can reconnect and strengthen their bonds.

The programme accommodates children of all ages, from babies to young adults, and focuses on ensuring that the time siblings spend together is meaningful and enjoyable. Activities are carefully designed to promote positive interactions and cater to a range of developmental stages.

Sibling Time is grounded in the belief that maintaining sibling relationships is key to a child's emotional health and stability. It provides children with a chance to create shared memories and build stronger connections, even when separated by care.

Sibling Time events are delivered by specialist staff experienced in creating safe, therapeutic environments for sibling contact. **The events aim to:**

- Include structured activities designed to foster emotional connections and collaboration.
- Provide a safe space for siblings to interact, with professional oversight to ensure the sessions are supportive and child-centred.
- Tailor activities to the needs and interests of the children, ensuring sessions are enjoyable and age-appropriate.

Sibling Time is informed by research demonstrating that well-managed

sibling contact leads to improved emotional well-being for children in care. According to Max Stanford, Head of Impact and Evaluation at Coram:

“Contact between siblings who have been separated in the care system is associated with positive well-being outcomes for children, but only when it is well-managed, with parents and carers actively supporting contact and taking children's wishes into account. Sibling Time shows significant promise in helping local authorities facilitate meaningful sibling connections.”

The programme is designed to address challenges in sibling contact by creating structured, supportive opportunities for children to spend quality time together. By involving carers and professionals, Sibling Time ensures that each child's wishes and feelings are prioritised, fostering trust and emotional security.

Maintaining sibling connections is a fundamental aspect of supporting children in care. **Sibling Time bridges the gap between separated siblings, offering them opportunities to:**

- Build strong, lasting relationships.
- Experience moments of joy and normalcy during challenging times.
- Develop emotional connections that support their mental health and overall well-being.

Coram's Sibling Time service is a step toward ensuring children in care maintain these critical relationships, empowering them to feel supported and valued within their family networks. Local authorities and agencies are invited to partner with Coram to deliver Sibling Time sessions to families in their care.

[Read the Coram Institute for Children's evaluation report here.](#)





Creative Mentoring

By The Mighty Creatives, a registered charity

The Mighty Creatives, an award-winning charity, delivers youth services to some of the most underrepresented children and young people in society. With a vision rooted in social justice through arts, culture, and creativity, the organisation is committed to empowering young people facing adversity, disadvantage, and challenges.

Creative Mentoring is The Mighty Creatives' flagship service, **offering one-to-one support for children and young people through a unique, creative intervention model**. It is a person-centred approach that places young people at the heart of the service. The programme is designed to empower participants to explore their sense of self, develop their purpose and belonging, and discover new possibilities for their future.

Trained Creative Mentors—who are both creative practitioners and experienced youth workers—build trusted relationships with mentees. These mentors introduce engaging,

tailored creative activities that promote personal, social, and emotional development, as well as educational achievement. The mentoring process is continually refined through consultations with youth services and young people, ensuring it evolves to meet their needs.

The model was initially pioneered by Derbyshire County Council's Virtual School and The Amber Factory and has since been adapted and enhanced by The Mighty Creatives to support children in care and those most at risk of being not in education, employment, or training (NEET).

Eligible children and young people, aged 5–19, are referred to the Creative Mentoring service through partnerships with local authorities, Virtual Schools, alternative provision settings, CAMHS, cultural organisations, and other youth services. Participants are matched with a Creative Mentor for a set period, typically beginning with an initial intervention of 24 hours or more.

During this time, Creative Mentors:

- Build trusting relationships with mentees.

- Introduce tailored creative activities aligned with the child's interests.
- Facilitate inspiring experiences to help mentees grow emotionally, socially, and academically.

The service is designed to support children in their personal and educational journeys, helping them achieve positive outcomes in areas where they may face significant challenges.

Since 2020, the Creative Mentoring programme has:

- Supported nearly 200 children and young people, aged 5–19, across the region.
- Delivered creative interventions to help young people overcome barriers to education and personal development.
- Fostered positive outcomes for care-experienced children, as well as those facing systemic disadvantage.

The programme is funded by organisations such as Children in Need, What Works for Children's Social Care, Foyle Foundation, Arts Council England, and Charities Aid Foundation.

See more: [Creative Mentoring](#)

Family Business Model

By [Suffolk Council](#)

The Family Business, developed by Suffolk County Council, is an **employment model designed to support care leavers in building successful and fulfilling futures.**

Recognising the challenges faced by young people transitioning out of care, the programme focuses on creating meaningful employment opportunities and providing the tools and support needed for long-term success.

The Family Business operates on three core pillars, each aimed at empowering care leavers:

Ring-Fenced Apprenticeships:

Dedicated apprenticeships within the local authority offer hands-on experience in the public sector, providing care leavers with a strong foundation for future employment.

Employment Opportunities with Local Businesses:

Partnering with businesses across Suffolk, the programme creates job opportunities tailored to care leavers, ensuring a supportive and inclusive workplace environment.

Bespoke Training and Support

Programme: An 8-week Skills Academy equips participants with essential skills and prepares them to enter the workforce with confidence.

The Family Business is underpinned by the belief in the power of community. As a corporate parent, Suffolk County Council leverages its extensive network to provide care leavers with opportunities and connections. Beyond this, the programme aspires to create a network of 'community parents'—local champions committed to supporting care leavers by offering meaningful work-based opportunities and mentorship.

By fostering this collaborative approach, The Family Business seeks to empower care leavers to thrive in their careers and achieve their goals.

A cornerstone of The Family Business model is its 8-week Skills Academy, a comprehensive training programme with accredited learning outcomes.

Participants receive tailored support in:

- **English and maths skills:** Building confidence in fundamental academic areas.
- **Health and safety awareness:** Preparing for safe and responsible work environments.
- **Wellbeing and resilience:** Promoting mental health and emotional well-being.

Teamwork and communication:

Strengthening interpersonal skills for the workplace.

Problem-solving and money

management: Equipping participants with essential life and employment skills.

The Skills Academy also provides valuable networking opportunities, allowing care leavers to meet local employers, career advisors, and industry professionals to gain insights into their potential career paths.

The programme features a dedicated Family Business Coordinator to provide continuous guidance and support to both care leavers and their employers.

The coordinator plays a crucial role in ensuring success by:

- Conducting weekly check-ins at the start of employment to address any challenges and offer support.
- Acting as an advocate for care leavers, attending meetings and addressing concerns.
- Connecting participants to additional services or resources when needed.

To further support employers, The Family Business provides a detailed manager's guide outlining available resources and strategies for creating a nurturing and productive work environment.

See more: [The Family Business](#)



Exploring Innovations in Transition to adulthood study (EXIT)

By the [University of Warwick](#)

The EXIT Study, led by the University of Warwick, **investigates the challenges and opportunities in scaling practices designed to support care leavers as they transition to adulthood.** While numerous ideas are trialled, few progress beyond their initial pilots or local contexts. The study aims to understand the factors that enable innovations to become sustainable, scalable, and integrated into widespread practice.

The study seeks to:

- Map existing innovations across the UK aimed at supporting young people leaving care.
- Identify factors that help or hinder the implementation of innovations in practice.
- Develop strategies to promote the wider adoption of impactful innovations.
- Evaluate outcomes of innovation in four key areas: How innovation spreads, how it is adapted, its impact on care leavers and implementation costs.
- Trace the journey of innovation, examining adaptations necessary for its growth and the resulting outcomes for care leavers.

At the core of the EXIT Study is a series of six case studies conducted over two years in diverse geographical and organisational contexts across the UK. Using a co-production methodology, the EXIT team collaborates closely with host organisations to examine and improve their processes for implementing innovation.

The study aims to compare findings across these case studies to uncover common challenges, successful strategies, and lessons about how innovation can become sustainable and achieve broader impact.

The **six case study sites** are drawn from a variety of contexts, including local authorities, charity organisations, and collaborative partnerships. Each provides a unique lens through which to examine the processes of innovation and scale-up.

1 Commissioned Service: Local Authority and Children's Trust Collaboration

This case focuses on two innovations:

- A city-wide initiative addressing the needs of vulnerable young people, including care leavers.
- A therapeutic intervention for care-experienced parents at risk of losing their children to adoption.

The study explores the barriers and enablers to implementing these innovations within a complex partnership between a city council and an independently operating Children's Trust.

2 Collaborative Partnership: Local Authority and NHS Trust

This case examines how a partnership between a city council and an NHS Trust has improved healthcare services for care leavers transitioning to adulthood. The study highlights healthcare as a critical but often overlooked area of transition compared to other domains, such as housing or education.

3 Charity Sector: Established National Charity

A long-established charity places care leavers at the centre of its innovation process. This case demonstrates how empowering care leavers to design, pilot, and scale innovations can drive meaningful and impactful change, rather than having innovations imposed on them.

4 Charity Sector: Emerging National Charity

This case explores a newer charity that successfully scaled an initial innovation to multiple locations across the UK. By examining this success story, the EXIT team seeks to understand the factors that contribute to sustainable growth and broader dissemination of innovations.

5 and 6. Local Authority Context: In-House Innovation

- The final two case studies focus on local authorities in the North of England that are developing in-house innovations to improve care leaver outcomes. These innovations are often less publicised and attract limited funding, yet they play a crucial role in enhancing local services. The study investigates what supports or hinders these efforts within the local authority setting.

The EXIT Study asks critical questions about the lifecycle of innovation:

- Why do so many innovations fail to sustain or scale beyond their pilot stages?
- What practices and processes enable innovations to thrive, adapt, and spread?
- How can innovation be better supported to ensure long-term benefits for care leavers?

By exploring diverse organisational contexts and comparing case study findings, **the EXIT Study aims to provide actionable insights into:**

- Effective strategies for scaling innovation in care leaver services.
- The importance of co-production and stakeholder collaboration.
- Practical recommendations for funders, practitioners, and policymakers to better support innovation.

Ultimately, the study seeks to improve the transition to adulthood for care leavers by fostering sustainable, impactful innovations that address their unique needs and challenges.

See more: What is the EXploring Innovation in Transition (EXIT) Study and what are we doing?



Preparing for Adulthood

By [Birmingham City Council](#)

The Transitions and Preparation for Adulthood (PfA) Service is designed to provide **personalised, early support for young people transitioning into adulthood**. By engaging with individuals earlier in their journey, the service ensures smoother transitions and better outcomes tailored to their unique needs and aspirations.

The service offers customised support plans to meet the specific needs of each young person. **Support is delivered through:**

- 1:1 sessions: Providing focused, individualised guidance.
- Group sessions: Fostering peer support and shared learning experiences.

Each young person is actively involved in shaping their own support plan, giving them a voice and control over

their goals and the direction of their journey. This collaborative approach empowers young people to feel confident and invested in their future.

To enhance the quality of support, the service has integrated the Preparation for Adulthood (PfA) and Statutory Transitions teams into a single, cohesive unit. This alignment allows professionals to work collaboratively, ensuring a more seamless and consistent experience for the young people they support.

While the organisational structure has evolved, **the purpose and focus of the teams remain the same:**

- To support young adults aged 18 to 25 with learning disabilities, autism, or other eligible needs.
- To help individuals access funded services from Adult Social Care, as determined by the Care Act eligibility criteria.
- To empower young people to set and achieve their own goals, fostering

independence and positive decision-making.

In addition to statutory support, the service provides non-statutory support for young people and young adults aged 14 to 25.

The service aims to create a strong foundation for each individual, equipping them with the tools and confidence to achieve their aspirations.

The Transitions and Preparation for Adulthood service exemplifies the importance of early intervention, collaboration, and personalised support for young people with learning disabilities, autism, or other eligible needs. By aligning teams and focusing on the individual, the service ensures that each young person has the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential as they navigate the transition to adulthood.

See more: [Preparation for Adulthood Service \(Adults PfA\)](#)

Next Venture Fund for Care Leavers

By [Durham County Council](#)

At Durham County Council, the voices of care-experienced young people are at the heart of decision-making. To support this, the council's Chief Executive awarded **a £10,000 funding pot specifically for projects designed to benefit care leavers**. Named the Next Venture Fund, this initiative not only provides vital opportunities for care leavers but also empowers them to take the lead in shaping its direction.

What makes the Next Venture Fund exceptional is that care leavers themselves play a central role in managing the programme. Young people are encouraged to submit funding applications for projects that promote positive emotional well-being, build social connections, and create opportunities for participation.

These applications are reviewed by a panel of care leavers, who guide the fund's direction and oversee its financial administration. This peer-led approach ensures the initiative is aligned with the needs and aspirations of care leavers, while also providing participants with valuable skills in leadership, financial management, and decision-making.

The Next Venture Fund aims to:

- Promote emotional health and well-being by reducing isolation and fostering social networks.
- Provide new opportunities for care leavers to participate in meaningful activities.
- Equip care leavers with skills for future careers, both through applying for funding and participating in the panels.

Since its launch in March 2024, the fund has awarded nearly £7,000, supporting ten diverse projects that directly benefit care leavers.

The Next Venture Fund has supported a wide range of initiatives, including:

- **Day activities for care leavers and Young People Advisors (YPAs):** These activities help build stronger relationships, enabling professionals to take on a more supportive, friendship-based role.
- **Equipment for baby and toddler groups:** Providing resources for groups hosted at the care leavers' hub to support young parents.
- **University start-up packs:** Helping young people transition into higher education with essential items.
- **Training opportunities:** Offering

training for care leavers to develop skills in applying for their own funding through initiatives like the Key Fund.

- **Cinema passes:** Encouraging care leavers to engage in social activities and reduce isolation.

Each of these projects reflects the programme's commitment to fostering independence, emotional well-being, and community engagement for care leavers.

The Next Venture Fund offers more than just financial support; it provides care leavers with the opportunity to develop essential life and career skills. **Through participating on the funding panel, young people gain experience in areas such as:**

- Decision-making and teamwork.
- Financial administration and budgeting.
- Project evaluation and impact assessment.

These experiences not only enhance their personal development but also prepare them for future challenges in their careers and daily lives.

See more: ['Great stories from our children and families social work teams'](#)

Local House Projects

By National House Project, a registered charity

The National House Project (NHP) empowers care leavers to transition into adulthood with confidence, skills, and a sense of community. Using a psychologically informed practice framework, **the initiative focuses on helping young people develop the knowledge, relationships, and resilience needed to build their first home and achieve long-term independence.**

This approach was co-designed with young people, asking a fundamental question: "What makes a house a home?" The result is a relational model where care-experienced young people work together with staff to create a home and build a supportive, enduring community.

Key features of Local House Projects (LHPs) include:

1 Young People at the Centre

LHPs are co-designed and co-created with care-experienced young people. They play an active role in decision-making, ensuring their voices shape the programme and that it reflects their needs and aspirations.

2 Trauma-Informed Practice

Staff are trained in trauma-informed and responsive practices, supported by psychologists. Using the ORCHIDS Practice Framework, staff tailor their support to each young person, ensuring consistent and informed care.

3 Building Community

Young people join LHPs as part of a group, fostering a strong sense of community and mutual support. This network reduces isolation and loneliness, providing young people with a sustainable support system as they transition into adulthood.

4 Education, Training, and Employment (ETE)

Young people participating in the House Project Programme are engaged in education, training, or employment (ETE). They achieve AQA accreditation and are supported to follow long-term ETE pathways, enhancing their career prospects and independence.

5 Creating a Home

Young people work with housing providers to select and renovate their homes. They have the opportunity to personalise their living spaces, transforming houses into homes. Importantly, they are able to stay in their homes indefinitely if they choose, ensuring stability and security.

The House Project approach delivers significant improvements for care leavers:

- Enhanced emotional, physical, and mental health.
- Stronger connections to community and reduced feelings of isolation.
- No tenancy breakdowns or evictions to date, highlighting the effectiveness of the support provided.
- Reduced involvement with the criminal justice system.

Accommodation costs are one of the highest expenses for local authority social care budgets, often with limited evidence of good outcomes for young people. **The House Project provides a cost-effective solution:**

- The primary cost is the establishment of the LHP team, which supports young people during their transition.
- Young people remain in their placements while preparing for their move into independent housing. Once they move, placement costs are avoided, resulting in significant cost savings that exceed the operational costs of the LHP.

By replicating the principles of "staying close," LHPs offer a safe, supported step-down from residential, foster care, or supported accommodation. This intensive yet cost-effective model reduces demand on broader local authority and partner agency budgets.

The House Project approach is built on a flexible framework co-designed with young people, staff, and professionals. It identifies **key fidelity elements** that ensure consistency while allowing adaptation to local contexts:

- Corporate and political support to champion the initiative.
- Dedicated staff teams trained in trauma-informed practice.
- A shared base for staff and young people, fostering collaboration.
- Partnerships with housing providers to secure suitable homes.
- Psychological support to equip staff to meet young people's needs effectively.

This framework allows local authorities to meet the unique needs of their care leavers while maintaining the core principles of the House Project approach.

Since the launch of the first LHP in 2015, **the model has demonstrated the following outcomes:**

- Care-experienced young people have shared their experiences with government ministers in England and Scotland, influencing policy and practice.
- The programme has expanded to multiple local authorities, offering a flexible solution that can be tailored to different regions.
- Young people have reported feeling empowered, supported, and equipped to build meaningful futures.

"I've managed to find somewhere and be a part of something that is the best part of life, which is friendship, which is love, which is hope, which is making the world a better place in our small way by making the passages through to adulthood from the care system that much better."



Extending Shared Lives to Care Leavers

By [Shared Lives Plus](#), a registered charity

Shared Lives Plus, the UK membership charity for people living and working in Shared Lives care or Homeshare, **is expanding its foster-style care model to support young people leaving care.** Traditionally aimed at adults with learning disabilities, Shared Lives is now being offered to care leavers aged 16 and over across 16 council areas in England, Scotland, and Wales over the next two years.

The Shared Lives model pairs young people or adults in need of long-term support with a carefully approved carer. Together, they share the carer's home, family life, and community. This arrangement provides a stable, nurturing environment where individuals can develop independence, learn life skills, and feel part of a supportive network.

Half of those using Shared Lives live with their chosen carer as part of their household, while the other half visit for day support or short breaks. The initiative is built on the belief that a home is more than just a place to live—it is a foundation for well-being, growth, and connection.

For young people leaving care, the transition to adulthood can be particularly challenging, especially for those with learning disabilities, mental health needs, or life-limiting conditions. Shared Lives provides a consistent, supportive base during this critical period, ensuring that care leavers have the help they need to thrive.

The programme matches care-experienced young people with families or individuals who celebrate their unique gifts and identities. Beyond providing a home, carers help young people engage in local youth and leisure activities, enabling them to build confidence, skills, and a sense of belonging.

Shared Lives for care leavers is now available in areas including:

- England: Birmingham, Newcastle, Portsmouth, Oxfordshire, and the London boroughs of Hounslow, Islington, and Hackney.
- Wales: Powys.
- Scotland: Borders Council.

Shared Lives is proven to have a profound impact on individuals and communities:

- 85% of participants reported improved social lives, and 89% felt more involved in their community.
- The consistent support of Shared Lives carers fosters emotional and mental health improvements.

- Young people gain essential life skills and confidence, preparing them for a successful future.
- Shared Lives care typically costs **£30,000 less per person annually** compared to traditional care models. Expanding Shared Lives to more regions could generate public sector savings exceeding **£100 million per year** while improving outcomes for care leavers and their families.

There are 10,000 Shared Lives carers in the UK, recruited and trained through one of 146 regulated local schemes. Carers undergo rigorous recruitment and training to ensure they can provide safe, personalised care. The [Care Quality Commission \(CQC\)](#) rates the sector highly, with 96% of services classified as good or outstanding.

During the pandemic, Shared Lives Plus adapted quickly, launching an online recruitment and approval process that recruited nearly 200 new carers and facilitated over 100 matches in less than six months.

With funding from the [Rayne Foundation](#), [Segalman Trust](#), and [Headley Trust](#), Shared Lives Plus is committed to scaling the programme for care leavers across the UK. Their ambition is to make Shared Lives an integral part of every local authority's offer for care-experienced young people.

Katie Brown, Director of Adult Social Care at [North East Lincolnshire Council](#), advocates for Shared Lives to be embedded in all local offers, stating: *"I have seen first-hand the difference Shared Lives care makes... The challenge and the opportunity for this programme is for local authorities to work with young people and local partners to develop services together."*

See more: [Care leavers and young people in transition](#)



85%

OF PARTICIPANTS REPORTED
IMPROVED SOCIAL LIVES

Children and Young People with Experience of Care

By The Churchill Fellowship, a registered charity



In 2023, the Churchill Fellowship launched a three-year programme of Fellowships focused on Children and Young People with Experience of Care. This Fellowship theme is focused on improving the lives and outcomes of children and young people with experience of care. This programme offers individuals the opportunity to discover new ideas and best practice from around the world and will support them to apply that learning and inspire change in children's social care in the UK.

Coram is acting as a knowledge partner, supporting the Fellows' research and its dissemination, and the programme is co-funded by the Hadley Trust.

For more information about the Children and Young People with Experience of Care Fellowships, please visit:
<https://www.churchillfellowship.org/become-a-fellow/our-current-programmes/children-and-young-people-with-experience-of-care/>

**the
CHURCHILL
fellowship**

Niketa Sanderson-Gillard: How WhyCare is transforming the foster care journey



Niketa is the Founder and CEO of *Why Care*, a fostering social enterprise focused on improving the assessment, preparation and support of foster carers.

The UK foster care system is in crisis, with too few carers to meet the growing need for stable, loving fostering homes. *Why Care* is a social enterprise tackling this challenge by integrating the voices of those with lived experience—ensuring that the insights of foster carers and care-experienced individuals shape better outcomes for both children and carers. By combining advanced assessment techniques, targeted training, and ongoing peer support, *Why Care* makes the fostering journey more intuitive and effective. This approach not only improves recruitment and retention but also provides Local Authorities with a sustainable solution to foster care shortages.

The Churchill Fellowship has been instrumental in refining and building *Why Care*'s model, drawing on global best practices to create a more holistic, data-driven approach. Understanding the similarities and differences with systems in Canada and Nigeria has allowed us to further develop our approach and think more boldly about what different groups of carers and the children placed with them need.

For more information, visit: whycare.org.uk

Esme Miller: Meeting the distinct needs of UK LGBTQ+ children in care

Esme Miller (she/her) is a qualified children and adolescent CBT therapist and Social Worker. She currently works as a CAMHS Clinical Specialist in South London, delivering therapy and care coordination to young people experiencing mental health difficulties and emotional distress.

What am I researching and why did I choose the topic?

My research has focused on investigating how organizations in the USA and Canada are supporting and addressing the specific challenges experienced by LGBTQ+ young people in care, and what changes can be made in the UK, to enhance support systems for LGBTQ+ young people in care.

Over the years, and as a queer person myself, I have become increasingly aware of the disproportionate representation of LGBTQ+ youth among those in care and those receiving social care intervention. That said, I have also felt that within CAMHS and CSC (Children's Social Care), we continue to lack understanding of the specific challenges faced by this group of young people. Whilst working directly with LGBTQ+ youth has brought some of these challenges to light for me, a growing body of research illuminates the experiences of a far wider sample of LGBTQ+ young people in care, highlighting the widespread and unique difficulties faced by this group.

How did I conduct my study?

I interviewed organizers and practitioners leading or working within organizations that support LGBTQ+ youth in care. Through these conversations, I identified five key themes, from which I drew recommendations to improve support for LGBTQ+ youth in care within the UK.

What are my key findings?

Collaboration among professionals was identified as key to supporting LGBTQ+ youth in care and positively influencing their self-identity. Key findings include the success of ongoing training programs, such as those from the Ackerman Institute, which help practitioners create safe, affirming spaces, foster gender inclusivity, and address gender bias within their workspaces. Similarly, 1:1 consultation, like those offered by Out and Proud, provide practitioners opportunities to reflect on biases and deepen their understanding of the unique challenges LGBTQ+ youth face. Finally, the development of comprehensive SOGI guidelines is essential for ensuring best practices and creating a non-discriminatory environment for these youth.

My research emphasizes the importance and benefits of tailored, group support for LGBTQ+ youth, both in and out of care. Such support focuses on building coping strategies, enhancing self-esteem, and understanding their distress as a valid response to systemic factors like discrimination and stigma. Programs like AFFIRM, with an emerging evidence base, offer effective interventions to help LGBTQ+ youth in care improve their well-being, and can be used here in the UK.

Data collection emerged as a crucial element in understanding the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in care. I observed that, similar to the UK, there is strong advocacy for comprehensive and trauma-informed data collection in both the US and Canada. Such data could play a vital role in shaping policy and securing funding to improve support systems for LGBTQ+ youth in care.

Family support, especially for trans and gender-diverse youth, plays a significant role in improving well-being. Research shows that strong parental support leads to better mental health and life outcomes for gender-diverse youth. Programs like AFFIRM and Ten Oaks support caregivers to develop a better understanding of their LGBTQ+ youth and be supported to foster a more supportive and safer environment at home.

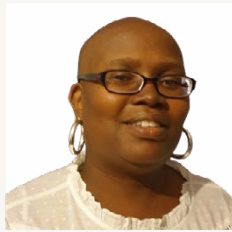
Finally, intersectionality emerged as a key theme, illustrating how factors like race, gender, and socio-economic status intersect to shape the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in care. These overlapping identities create unique challenges, especially for those who may face compounded forms of discrimination. It's crucial to create more inclusive, intersectional support systems to better address the diverse needs of LGBTQ+ youth in care.

To strengthen support for LGBTQ+ youth in care, I recommend several initiatives: updating NHS CAMHS and Children's Social Care databases to collect gender and sexuality data, piloting the AFFIRM and AFFIRM Caregiver programs, and implementing mandatory training to address LGBTQ+ discrimination while learning how to actively dismantle heterosexism and cisgenderism. Additional recommendations include creating supportive, reflective groups for parents and carers of gender-diverse youth, improving accessibility to LGBTQ+ youth spaces, developing SOGI guidelines with a dedicated lead, and offering 1:1 consultation for practitioners. Lastly, reviewing physical and digital spaces in CAMHS and CSC to ensure they are inclusive will improve the overall safety, support, and inclusivity for LGBTQ+ youth in care.

What are my next steps and ongoing challenges?

I plan to share my findings within my NHS foundation and pursue additional funding opportunities to advance my recommendations. To implement some of these ideas as pilot projects, I will seek support from LGBTQ+ networks within my organization and explore grants from programs like Change Makers. Additionally, I will engage with the Children's Social Care service in my borough, with our Children Looked After team within CAMHS, and continue to advocate for these changes and increased awareness within my own team. What will be particularly important, and something that is a shortcoming of my research, is for these ideas to be taken forward with feedback, scrutiny and input of LGBTQ+ young people in care, who are the experts by experience.

Sharon McPherson: Reimagining kinship care through cultural curiosity



Sharon McPherson is a kinship carer and Co-Founder of Families In Harmony (FIH), a black led, lived experienced social enterprise offering family support services to African, Caribbean and Black Mixed Heritage kinship care families. FIH is also a racial justice campaigning organisation operating as a critical friend

to improve racial equity across research, policy, practice and service development in children's social care. Sharon chairs the Kinship Care Alliance Race Equality subgroup. FIH have recently been recognised as one of the Big Issue top 100 Change Makers for 2025.

What am I researching and why did I choose the topic?

My research into understanding the cultural and family dynamics context of kinship care came about initially due to ongoing dearth in knowledge relating to the assessment, engagement and support needs of African and Caribbean kinship care families. The need for such cultural context knowledge was further compounded by the death of my grandson Ryan aged 14 in 2022, as he experienced as a black boy adultification by professionals which led to his mental health vulnerabilities as a child going unseen.

My research country choice came about because the largest population of 'Windrush' migrants came from Jamaica. My interest in the correlation between the adverse childhood experiences (ACE's) of the Windrush migration 'Barrel Children' (those left behind in with relatives) and ACE's of Caribbean heritage Kinship Care children in England. This was coupled with exploring if living in a predominately black populated country verses living in a host predominately white populated country had any bearing on the cultural practices and support needs of kinship families.

How did I conduct my study?

I used a narrative research approach to explore my research questions. 10 kinship caregivers and 20 professional's representatives from state agencies including child protection, social work, education, family courts and social security, alongside faith leaders, ward councillors and community workers participated. Their lived experience narratives was gathered using semi-structured 1-2-1 interviews and focus groups whilst in Jamaica, alongside 1-2-1 online meetings pre and post field research visit. The key findings offer a summary of the themes generated from these discussions.

What are my key findings?

Caregiver Findings Summary

- Trust was more easily gained when lived experience and shared identity was present through the use of peer research approach.
- The female headed kinship care households dominated the landscape, similar to that in England, and possible links to gender role expectations.
- Socio-economic mobility through economic migration still dominates the kinship care landscape in Jamaica.
- Traditional parenting practices trump therapeutic parenting practice which meant adverse childhood experiences weren't considered in children perceived poor behaviour.
- Intergenerational conflict present due to expectations of traditional respect and moral values versus digital technology influences and usage.
- Jamaica operates a state provision equivalent to UK Universal Credit to prevent families falling into absolute poverty. Contradicted informal caregivers lacking appropriate support to meet the basic needs of food, shelter and education. Just like in the UK, informal caregivers make up the majority population of kinship care.

Professionals Findings Summary

- The importance of trauma informed practice and teaching staff acting as first responders to home and community linked safeguarding issues was universal across teaching staff interviews. Although many spoke of using 'common sense' and a safeguarding approach rather than actually being trained in this area.
- The stretch on resources leading to multiple roles converged into one.

- School is the 'safe place' for many children who exposed to exploitation by gangs, peers and familial abuse.
- The practice of 'child shifting' – this is where a child or children are placed by parents or other relatives with a family member, then that child is moved around relatives' homes.
- Behaviour management within schools was administered from an inclusion rather than exclusion perspective.
- Professionals and caregivers stated that state assistance to address childhood poverty had to high a threshold.
- Workforce capacity and development and large caseloads creating further risks.
- Jamaica's lack of Kinship Care legislation or strategy possibly putting children in informal and formal arrangements at risk.

My research creates insight into whether regulation through court orders of informal kinship care should be the primary focus or improving visibility of children in these arrangements and extending existing formal support provisions should be the kinship care strategy focus. My research also raises questions as to the hidden impact and legacy of Windrush on the Caribbean communities in England, particularly in relation to generational trauma, family fragmentation and reunification.

Families In Harmony will build on this research through the launch of its #SeeEveryChild Campaign, recognising that it is the poor visibility of children in informal kinship care arrangements, and the racial disparities in assessments and support service provision for black kinship carers within formal arrangements that is stemming the progression of racial equity. We will have a greater focus on utilising this campaign to improve kinship care local offer and lobby for research funding and the greater use of racialised lens in policy, practice and service development.

Lauren Page-Hammick: Supporting care leavers' safe transitions to adulthood and preventing homelessness



Lauren has worked across voluntary and community sector organisations for more than 10 years. She has had a range of roles focussed on improving supports and systems around people experiencing disadvantage, including violence, homelessness, and care experience. This has included

developing and delivering a housing pathway for individuals and families fleeing domestic abuse and other forms of violence in London and more recently, practice, policy and advocacy work to improve system and service responses to young people experiencing homelessness. Lauren currently works at Research in Practice as Research and Development Manager (Children & Families).

What am I researching and why did I choose this topic?

At the end of 2023 I started my Churchill Fellowship, for which I researched homelessness prevention interventions that could meet the needs of the growing group of young people who enter care at an older age. This group often enter care with complex risks and vulnerabilities. I wanted to identify interventions that were responsive to the specific risks, and challenges experienced by this group of young people. This included interventions that address the cumulative impact of harm on young people and the extra risks posed by the coping behaviours young people may use that bring further risk.

While young people leaving care face unique disadvantages, I wanted to situate their experiences of housing stability within the growing injustice of youth homelessness, and my Fellowship explored what a youth housing offer could look like, and strategic approaches that were being taken at national and regional levels to address youth homelessness.

What are my key findings?

A number of interrelated variables affect a young person's experience of transitioning into adulthood including housing, employment, relational safety and connection and mental health/emotional wellbeing. For young people leaving care there is a huge risk that one or more of these factors will not be sufficiently attended to, and as a result the risk of homelessness is increased.

Too often support for young people leaving care focuses on 'independent living' skills at the cost of attending to the emotional and relational support needs of young people. My report spotlights housing and support models that prioritise stabilisation and safety for young people as they transition into adulthood, alongside work to foster meaningful relationships between young people, their communities and the significant people in their lives.

My findings are organised under five themes: Building and sustaining meaningful relationships and networks, Housing Models, Decolonising care and support, strategy, leaving care and youth support.



I visited Helsinki in Finland; Vancouver, Kelowna, Calgary and Toronto in Canada; and New York City in the US to learn about approaches and interventions being used to prevent young people from becoming homeless.

How did I conduct my study?

In approaching this Fellowship, I was keen to draw learning from both child welfare and youth homelessness perspectives and interventions. Through online scoping I identified approaches to supporting young people exiting care and/or that focussed on preventing young people from becoming homeless in Finland, Canada and New York.

I collected information from the services and professionals and young people I visited through semi-structured one-to-one and group interviews. The majority of these interviews were recorded, which I later reviewed to identify key themes, and the quotes. While in British Columbia I was lucky to attend a Symposium on International Transitions from Child Protection which brought together researchers, policymakers, service providers, and advocates speaking with lived experience of the child welfare system, homelessness, or both.

For me, one of the most significant elements was visiting services who approached relationships as a basic need, reprioritising what is seen as fundamental support in the transition away from children's social services and what should be delivered within housing interventions. Similarly to the Lifelong Links programme delivered by the Family Rights Group, these interventions sought to connect young people to networks of people who were significant to them and provided support to young people and their chosen networks to explore, build and maintain these relationships in healthy and safe ways.

I hope my report will stimulate discussion, broaden understanding and provide insight into how post-care support for young people could be improved to prevent homelessness. Many of the approaches and interventions I discuss in my report resonate culturally with changes proposed under the Children's Wellbeing Bill, including the involvement and participation of a child's family network through Family Group Decision Making and greater emphasis on Kinship Care.

A National Voice Awards

By Coram Voice, a registered charity



The majority of local authorities in England have a children in care council or care leaver forum. These groups do lots of work and projects to influence and improve services. However, knowledge of, and impact from, their innovation is usually confined to the local area because there are limited ways to share learning with other areas.

To combat this, **'A National Voice awards' invites local authorities to nominate the work done by their local children in care council.** There are five award categories. The entries are judged by a panel of young people and professionals. Winners are celebrated at an annual conference ('Amplify'). Entries are shared nationally.

Acting on children's voice can lead to all sorts of positive developments in local authorities

Local authorities, their practitioners and wider policy-makers can learn much from children's views and ideas on how to improve the system. Children in care councils and care leavers forums are one way to do this. They can provide a safe and inclusive space for children to have their voice heard.

Acting on children's voice can lead to all sorts of positive developments in local authorities. However, we do not always hear about this work -organisations don't routinely publish information about the outcomes or impact of their engagement work with children such as whether it leads to changes in policy or practice.

Amplify is an event run by A National Voice for care-experienced children and young people. The aim of the day is to provide an opportunity for children in care councils and care leaver forums to come together, share experiences and celebrate the amazing work that they do. The 'A National Voice' awards are held as part of the event each year. The awards champion and recognise the work of children in care councils and care leaver forums in England.

"The Coram Innovation Incubator brings together experts in different sectors and this collaborative space allows for knowledge sharing and cross-pollination of ideas, ensuring that views of children's services practitioners are 'baked in' to the design of solutions."

– North Yorkshire Council





Initiatives that actively work alongside children and young people to develop solutions to the problems identified are invited to nominate their work. The five award categories are: (1) **Campaign Award**; (2) **Participation Award**; (3) **Voice Award**; (4) **Collaboration Award** and (5) **Digital Award**.

The awards started in 2022 and have run every year since. In total 126 entries have been received.

The focus of the work children in care and care leaver forums do differs; some influence policy; some raise awareness of issues; some focus on practice change and others create new resources for services.

Each nominee must submit an application (either a short slide set or video). **Entries are judged by a panel of care experienced young people and professionals on the following criteria:**

- **Idea** – how children and young people decided what to work on
- **Involvement** – how have children and young people been involved in the project
- **Impact** – how has the project impacted on individuals, group or wider care community

In each award category there is one winner plus a 2nd and 3rd runner-up. Representatives and young people from children in care councils are invited to the Amplify celebration event where the winners are announced. The event is an opportunity to share ideas and learning.

To date there have been 3 in-person events; in total over 320 young people and professionals have attended. The awards are planned and chaired by A National Voice Ambassadors supported by Coram Voice.

The winning and runner-up entries are detailed in short films and case studies. These are circulated across England and accessible in the Coram Voice resource bank.

WOW. What a day, meeting inspirational and hard working members of fellow care councils from up and down the country. What a privilege to meet other [young people] who are actively fighting for change, and carrying out the change we want to see ♥ @CoramVoice so thankful to experience this.

Quote about Amplify (Female)

Some of the past award entrants and winners are detailed here:

- Based on listening to the lived experiences of others, members of **York Children in Care Council** felt the housing service did not fully understand their corporate parenting responsibilities. To address this, a new housing protocol, informed by young people, has been introduced – it clearly emphasises the corporate parenting duties of housing colleagues. To make sure the work is embedded in practice, young people have developed training on corporate parenting, which they have delivered to staff.
- 'Our Promise' is a pledge to **children in care in Cumbria** – it is a list of promises made by the council. The Children in Care Council redesigned 'Our Promise' so that it is the best

it can be – to make sure everyone knows what children in care want and need. They made sure the focus was on what children said mattered to them and what they want from their social workers and carers. A series of posters have been produced to promote the work. It has also been incorporated into staff training.

- **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough young inspectors** have focused their scrutiny on 'family time' services. Eight young inspectors inspected four supervised contact centres and made more than fifty recommendations to the services on things such as accessibility, furniture, resources and storage. They also recommended the centres were redecorated and paintings put up to brighten the rooms.

Bright Spots programme

By Coram Voice, a registered charity



Founded 50 years ago as The Voice for the Child in Care, Coram Voice is itself the story of innovation and impact from the establishment of the first advocacy service in 1975 and creation of visiting advocacy and independent visitors services to the delivery of the national children in care council, A National Voice making change happen for children and young people in and leaving care.

The Bright Spots Programme was developed by Coram Voice in partnership with Professor Julie Selwyn at the Rees Centre, University of Oxford, with funding from the Hadley Trust. Over the last 10 years its tailored surveys have created an important national data set on subjective wellbeing of children in care and care leavers whilst the local surveys have supported innovation and improvement in local areas.

Back in 2013, the Programme asked a seemingly straightforward research question: 'which local authorities provided a good care journey for their children in care?' and the question could not be answered from the available data. Whilst there were objective measures, none of these focused on what children themselves feel about their lives (subjective well-being).

To fill this gap, four online surveys were developed to capture the views of children in care (*Your Life, Your Care* survey for each of the age groups 4 to 7 year, 8 to 10 years and 11 to 17 years) from 2013, and *Your Life Beyond Care* survey for care leavers since 2017. The surveys ask children and young people about their 'subjective well-being': how they feel about their lives at both the individual and interpersonal level.

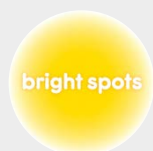
The questions are based on the Bright Spots Well-Being Indicators, a set of measures co-produced with children in care

and care leavers about what makes their lives good. To date 80 local authorities across the UK have taken part and we have had nearly 30,000 responses from children.

The Programme helps local authorities to improve children and young people's experience by focusing change where children say it is needed. Findings are used to influence practice, service development and strategic thinking. The Bright Spots practice bank is available to inform and inspire change and the sharing of experience and [can be found here](#)

Here we share some of the work that one local authority has done in response to their Bright Spots findings. Following Hull's Bright Spots survey, where they heard from nearly 400 children in care and care leavers, the local authority and children in care, picked five areas to focus on (challenging stigma; change of social worker; bullying; family time and friendships).

It gives you that evidence base on how children feel, which is the true measure on how you're doing as a local authority isn't it?



coramVoice)))
getting young voices heard

Development Officer

Hull's Bright Spots journey

Hull's Bright Spots survey results highlighted the impact on children of changes in social worker. Children wrote about how it made them feel when the change was not managed well. Hull has worked alongside their children in care council to develop a powerful podcast of views and experiences to share how it can feel when you have a change of worker and you don't know that this is happening and the podcast is now part of every new social workers' induction.

The new practice standards in Hull (linked to the Bright Spots wellbeing domains) are clear about the expectations of what should happen when there is a change of social worker and change of worker has been incorporated into their monthly audit processes to check whether practice is changing and improving in this area.

Creative response

Posters have been created to focus on 'you said' and 'we will do' to make sure children are always told the reason for a change of worker and reassured that this change is never their fault. Other imaginative projects include an award-winning film called Dream on based on the themes from their Bright Spots findings, 'Hopes and Fears' screen prints, a card game training resource for workers called 'The cards you're dealt', writing lyrics and composing a song (Shine Bright) which has been chosen as the 'song for the city 2025'.

A sculpture based on 'what makes life good' was unveiled by the Hull Chief Executive and is placed in the entrance of the main council building as a reminder of children's voice and Hull have committed considerable time to disseminate the Bright Spots findings across all departments of children's social care – from student social workers right up to the Director of Children's Services and elected council members.

Sessions have been held to give staff time to reflect on the findings and what it means for them in their role – those attending were asked to make 'pledges' about what they personally could do in response to what children have said – this has resulted in individual and team commitments to 'do' and 'think' differently. Hull's new corporate parenting strategy has been structured using the Bright Spots well-being domains.

Strategic commitment

Throughout all the work a central part has been keeping children updated on what is happening and letting them know their voice has made a difference. The Director of Children's Services wrote a thank you letter to all children in care to tell them about the findings and commitments to action, it was accompanied by a 'words and pictures' story and film.

Following Hull's Bright Spots survey, where they heard from nearly 400 children in care and care leavers, the local authority and children in care, picked five areas to focus on (challenging stigma; change of social worker; bullying; family time and friendships). The use of the survey ensures the journey continues.






How you can innovate further

Become a member of the **Coram Innovation Incubator** with access to innovation coaching and innovation project partnership or [sign up](#) to our regular newsletters.

[Attend our upcoming event](#) - From Insight to Impact: AI, Intersectionality, and the Future of Children's Services on Monday 15 September 2025.

[Get in touch with us](#) to tell us about any promising innovations you've seen from across the sector.

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**‘INNOVATION DISTINGUISHES
BETWEEN A LEADER
AND A FOLLOWER.’**

– Steve Jobs

A call for contributions:
tell us what you have seen

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