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## CII Innovation Collective

2024

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Insight • Innovation

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**THE HADLEY TRUST**

## Preface

Now in its third year, the **CII Innovation Collective** is the Coram Innovation Incubator's (CII) specialist repository, which collates and shares new, innovative projects from across the children's services sector and beyond. It seeks to promote learning and inspire children's services providers to trial new ways of working with children, young people and families.

Challenges faced by children and young people are growing in the context of an increasingly complex national and global climate. It is also well-known that the pressures facing public services are extensive, with rising demand and dwindling resources. To negotiate this complex context, the children and young people's sector must be adaptive and innovative so that it can continue to deliver better outcomes for children, young people and their families.

Showcasing work both from across the UK and further afield, this year, the **Collective** has highlighted that innovation and improvement is widespread across the sector, with services continually exploring new ways of operating and working with children and young people.

It has evidenced a welcomed focus in the sector on early intervention work, with providers looking at how they can develop new ways of approaching direct work to meet children, young people and parents where they are at and offer therapeutic and meaningful support. This will pay dividends in the longer term, facilitating better outcomes for children and families.

The importance of technology and opportunities afforded by digital innovation are clearer than ever. Many projects detailed in this report make use of digital tools for direct work with children and families and also support professionals to better understand and act upon key data about children and families. With the AI revolution underway, the CII is committed to leading the way in exploring how such technology can enhance outcomes for children, young people and families.

**“This report shows evidence of a clear appetite to innovate to effect positive change for children, young people and families.”**

Carol Homden, CEO, Coram

**“Innovation is an essential ingredient for high performing services.”**

Adrian Loades, Corporate Director of People, London Borough of Redbridge, Founding Member of the CII

In this year's **Collective**, we have also collaborated with colleagues across the charity sector to amplify the fantastic work they are doing to facilitate tangible change that will benefit children and young people. We are delighted that the **Collective** includes articles by Frontline and Barnardo's, as well as interviews with three Churchill Fellows, who are looking at how we can learn from global approaches to improve the experience of care for children and young people as part of a collaboration between Coram, the Churchill Fellowship and the Hadley Foundation.

We are pleased to share some insights and progress from the CII's Coram Innovation Inset, now in its second year, which is helping to drive innovation on the ground. We are also delighted to report on the significant progress made by North Yorkshire Council, supported by CII, Microsoft, Simpson Associates and the Department for Education, in its project looking to reimagine case management systems so they are better able to keep children and young people safe. We are excited to be launching the **Coram Innovation Playbook**, our web-based knowledge-sharing hub, see page 57 for more details.

The **Collective** demonstrates that achieving meaningful, practical change doesn't have to involve complex, radical organisational transformation. Rather it requires leaders to empower motivated staff with the time to invest in re-shaping their service offer and co-producing change with children and families across our diverse and rich communities.

We welcome dedicated investment programmes such as the Department for Education's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme, which has funded 94 projects via a £200 million investment, and Data and Digital Solutions Fund. However, to meet the ambitions of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and enable genuine innovation that works for children and families, investment must be faster, broader and more sustained. Coram's Charter for Children calls for **a fair share, a secure future** and **an equal chance**, setting out a route map for progress.

The Collective aims to showcase the inspiring work taking place across the sector and galvanise stakeholders to innovate locally and improve the service experience for children, young people and families.

**The will of dedicated children's services professionals to drive innovation is evident. But we need you to join us in our collective mission to create better outcomes for children, young people and families.**

If you would like to find out more about the CII or share any promising innovations, please email [innovation@coram.org.uk](mailto:innovation@coram.org.uk)

### About the Coram Innovation Incubator

The Coram Innovation Incubator (CII) is a specialist vehicle for children's services providers to work with the public, private and third sectors to generate, test and scale radical solutions to shared challenges facing the children's social care sector.

We do this through hosting knowledge sharing events, webinars and learning sets for members, facilitating forums to discuss practice improvements, as well as offering capacity to support the development of innovation projects in practice.

Our members this year are London Borough of Bromley, London of Havering, Hertfordshire County Council, North Yorkshire County Council, London Borough of Redbridge, Grosvenor Hart Homes and Barnardo's. Our three private sector supporters are EY, Microsoft and PA Consulting.

For more information about the CII, see [coram-i.org.uk/coram-innovation-incubator](https://coram-i.org.uk/coram-innovation-incubator)

# Early Intervention and Early Help Models

This section of the Collective considers projects, models and initiatives which are designed to identify children, young people and families who may be at risk of poor outcomes early and offer proactive and effective support to prevent needs from escalating. These are sometimes referred to as preventative approaches and improve the life chances of children, young people and families.



## ASK SALI – Hertfordshire County Council

**Ask SALI** is an advice line for schools and other professionals in health and social care to get advice quickly for children with SEND and their families. Set up by Hertfordshire County Council, the advice line is open 9-5 throughout the year. There are four SEND information advice and guidance officers who have a wide range of experience of working with children with SEND.

The service is staffed by 3 **Ask SALI** advisors, who are experienced in SEND services, having worked

across a number of backgrounds including in primary schools, children’s homes and healthcare settings. The service aims to provide quick, easy access to advice and support, with individuals able to contact the phone line within working hours.

The service works in partnership with schools and other agencies to ensure children get the right support as early as possible. Most children’s needs can be met through quality first teaching, adaptations and reasonable adjustments. The service is there to support with this and link other

services acting as the glue between services to enable professionals to get answers from one place.

[hertfordshire.gov.uk/microsites/local-offer/feedback/local-offer-blog/ask-sali.aspx](https://hertfordshire.gov.uk/microsites/local-offer/feedback/local-offer-blog/ask-sali.aspx)



## Bright Beginnings – No Limits

The **Bright Beginnings** project works with vulnerable young parents under 25 who are pregnant or have a child under 2, offering support focused on improving both parental and infant health. The project derived from the Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) in Southampton, with the idea of providing similar support to parents who would not typically meet the FNP criteria.

Designed to give parents a trusted, knowledgeable adult, No Limits assign one to one support to parents, either through a paid youth worker or a volunteer, a ‘befriender’. Acting as a ‘community grandparent’, befrienders give parenting guidance and advice, help to navigate community services and resources as well as being a consistent presence in a parent’s life. This enables parents to look after both their own physical and emotional health and that of their child. Befrienders may guide parents through various processes and paperwork they need to go through as new parents, for example immunisations for their child. With the addition of paid youth workers



to the model as a result of a large number of referrals, No Limits can now provide more regular and proactive support to parents, especially around safeguarding. In addition, **Bright Beginnings** now offers a training course, Gro Brain, for parents who are pregnant or have a child under 1, aiming to help develop emotionally healthy infants.

Most referrals come from within No Limits, but parents can also be referred by children’s services or health visitors. The intention is to extend the project to young parents who are isolated and do not have family support to assist with the development of parenting skills.

[nolimitshelp.org.uk/get-help/family-care/bright-beginnings](https://nolimitshelp.org.uk/get-help/family-care/bright-beginnings)

## Bringing Baby Home – Key Assets

Developed and funded by the Tasmanian government, **Bringing Baby Home** is an early intervention pilot programme providing intensive support to parents of infants classified as ‘at-risk’ to help prevent entry into the care system. As part of the programme, not-for-profit organisations like Key Assets Australia in Tasmania deliver a range of bespoke services with the aim of increasing parents’ capacity to parent safely. As part of an intensive, time-limited programme, parents are afforded the opportunity to develop their childcare skills while actively parenting full time within a supervised and supportive environment.

In Tasmania, Key Assets Australia work with parents in their homes across a 12-week period. During the first four weeks, monitoring, support and coaching is provided 24/7 in the home by a small team of Key Assets practitioners and key members of the family’s personal support network.

The model includes a range of elements; from comprehensive assessment to familial network development, counselling, targeted parenting education, emotional and practical support, advocacy and a respite care service. In some cases where the baby cannot be cared for in the home, parents and infant may be accommodated by a residential service. Key Assets Australia’s **Bringing Baby Home Service** will

partner with the residential service to provide Parenting Education and support transition and in-home support where suitable.

Although a formal evaluation of the pilot is yet to take place, there are indications that the programme helps to reduce risk through stabilising mental health, the implementation of harm minimisation practices, new knowledge and skills, safety plans and better support networks. There is also evidence that the programme allows babies to remain in their homes, with the support of wider networks. An external pilot evaluation is expected and Key Assets are exploring potential opportunities to work with parents prior to birth.

## Research and Development In Action

At Coram, innovation is embedded into our research to ensure we can secure the best, evidence-driven outcomes for children, young people and families.



### Family Group Conferences at Pre-Proceedings Stage

**Family Group Conferences (FGCs)** involve the family leading a meeting of a child's family, friends and network to come up with a plan to keep a child safe. A long-established and widespread practice deriving from New Zealand, it acknowledges the value of the family being central to the decision-making process for a child. Children may play a part in their own family group conference and the process is coordinated and supported by an independent coordinator.

A recent large-scale evaluation led by Coram, funded by Foundations – What Works Centre for Children & Families and supported by the charity Daybreak – the first of its kind- has demonstrated the impact of **FGCs** at the pre-proceedings stage. Supported by the charity Daybreak, the evaluation involved a randomised controlled trial, process evaluation and cost analysis, and considered the key factors in successfully delivering the approach and the impact on outcomes for children and families. A total of 2,500 children and almost 1,500 families took part across 21 local authorities, with half of the families receiving this intervention and the other half continuing to receive the standard local authority service.

The evaluation<sup>1</sup> found that in the twelve months after the pre-proceedings letter was issued, children

whose families were referred for an **FGC** were less likely to enter care, with just over a third (36.2%) going into care after being referred to an **FGC**, compared to almost half (44.8%) of those who were not referred for an **FGC**. They were also less likely to have care proceedings issued and 6 months later, they had been in care for less time than those who were not referred for an **FGC**.

There were no statistically significant differences in factors such as how included parents felt in their child's care planning or whether children's living arrangements had changed, however. The evaluation also indicated that cost savings of using **FGC**, with £960 being saved per child referred in the first year. The analysis found that if the approach was implemented across England, over 2,000 fewer children would enter care every year, with estimated savings of over £150 million in two years. The evaluation recommended the use of this approach more widely across the country, especially where it is delivered to a high-quality and complemented by other longer-term intervention. The evaluation also recommended further research to understand the impact of FGCs earlier than pre-proceedings, and Coram is working with Foundations to take forward work on FGCs.

[foundations.org.uk/our-work/reports/family-group-conferencing](https://foundations.org.uk/our-work/reports/family-group-conferencing)

**“We see the Systemic Practice Pilot as vitally important to drive the evidence around the effectiveness of systemic family practice in local areas to ensure that children and families in need have whole family support that they need at the right time.”**

Carol Homden, CEO, Coram



### Supporting Families Systemic Practice Pilot Study

Coram will be leading a **Supporting Families Programme Systemic Practice Pilot Study**, as part of a commission by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and Department for Education. Systemic practice has a long history with its roots in systemic therapy where the focus is on group relationships or networks, such as family and friends, rather than solely on an individual's thoughts and feelings. Systemic practice with families involves a practitioner working collaboratively with a family to understand their family relationships and history in order to help them resolve issues by working on these and other relationships.

A consortium led by Coram and the Institute of Family Therapy (IFT) will deliver a pilot to embed systemic practice in Supporting Families keyworker teams in six local authorities. This will include specialist training for keyworkers on systemic family practice in the trial, the hiring of systemic practitioners and on-going support via a virtual systemic practice hub hosted by IFT.

The pilot will be evaluated through a randomised controlled trial. Six additional local authorities will form the control group to facilitate the evaluation and will be provided with financial and technical support to collect data throughout the pilot. They will also be offered training in systemic practice for keyworkers after the pilot has ended in late 2025. The findings will contribute to the development of the Supporting Families Programme and broader early help policy, including the Government's reform of children's social care and its strategy, Stable Homes, Build on Love.

Local authorities are now able to submit an expression of interest to participate in the pilot until a deadline of 11 March 2024. Preliminary set up will begin in May, with the pilot beginning in September 2024 and continuing until December 2025.

**For more information about this pilot study, please see**

[coram.org.uk/supporting-families-systemic-practice-model-pilot-study](https://coram.org.uk/supporting-families-systemic-practice-model-pilot-study)

### Reducing Parental Conflict – Coram

The UK government has allocated £2.8 million to fund eight new projects across England aimed at **reducing parental conflict** and supporting families in need. The projects will target families at risk of conflict and provide face-to-face and digital support to promote healthier relationships between parents, helping families lead more fulfilling lives. The projects will also help parents in early stages of conflict to deal with their difficulties, improve their lives and ensure a stable and healthy environment for the children. The projects will support a diverse range of parents across England to manage their relationship difficulties, including those with children who have special educational needs, those in rural areas, young parents, LGBTQ+ parents, black, Asian, minority ethnic families, and parents at risk of unemployment.

Coram was successful in securing funding for their project – using relational therapy solutions with families facing adversity. Coram's Creative Parenting Services will combine practice to offer couples under 30 at risk of family conflict a new schools programme.

Coram's three tier offer provides Child and Family Interventions, evaluation and analysis with insight into what works with disadvantaged families to pre-empt and reduce conflict, and training and dissemination of materials and tools for use as self-help or facilitated interventions.

This initiative will focus on several disadvantaged families with stressors in the Camden and Lambeth area.

[gov.uk/government/news/new-projects-launched-to-reduce-parental-conflict-and-help-families-thrive](https://gov.uk/government/news/new-projects-launched-to-reduce-parental-conflict-and-help-families-thrive)

<sup>1</sup> Taylor, S., Blackshaw, E., Lawrence, H., Stern, Gilbert, L., Raghoo, N. (2023) Randomised controlled trial of Family Group Conferencing At Pre-Proceedings Stage. Foundations, <https://foundations.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Randomised-controlled-trial-family-group-conferencing.pdf>

### **Dream, Believe, Succeed – Edmonton Community Partnership**

**Dream, Believe, Succeed** is an in-school and extracurricular programme that seeks to divert young people away from serious violence through offering a curriculum of inspiring, creative experiences. The project, which won the CYPN Youth Work Award in 2022, is a partnership between a number of local organisations in Edmonton. This early intervention programme is specifically designed to align with the interests and ambitions of the young people it supports and provides a safe space for them to express their concerns or anxieties related to gangs and youth violence. Youth mentors work with young people through both one-to-one and group sessions. The sessions involve creative arts elements, for example, drama, role play or spoken word, and workshops are also delivered by industry experts, including artists, musicians and filmmakers.

The programme aims to offer guidance to young people on how they may approach certain scenarios and make positive choices. Other aspects include working with the British DJ and MC Academy to develop a radio station presented by children for children and there is an additional family intervention aspect. To further elevate the educational experiences of at-risk youth, **Dream, Believe, Succeed** also facilitates 'Closing the Gap' math workshops, with the goal of levelling up their academic abilities and preparing them for the world ahead. At the end of the programme, there is a production at a local theatre produced by the children involved.

In Edmonton, the programme is delivered across 18 schools, including both primary and secondary schools, a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and a special needs college.

<https://edmontoncommunitypartnership.org/projects/dream>

### **Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) Triage Panel – Blackpool Better Start**

Blackpool Better Start have implemented a **Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) Triage Panel** to improve early identification of and support for children with speech, language and communication needs. It was formed in 2020 in order to identify local children who were not accessing language assessments and interventions. This panel comprises of a multi-agency team, including an NHS SLC therapist, an SLC Therapist from the commissioned service 'Communicate', the local authority Early Years Team Manager, a literacy advisory teacher, a Community Connector from Blackpool Better Start and is Chaired by The Early Years Senior Manager. Meeting every two weeks, the panel considers new referrals and discusses the next steps for children as they approach the end of their interventions. Referrals come from both health and pre-schools, usually after a child's WellComm Assessment. Following referral, a Community Connector is assigned to each family and as part of an informal phone conversation, they help them to understand what the panel will involve, as well as finding out more about the child, family and any challenges accessing services. This can include factors such as digital poverty or



complex needs of children and other family members. This information is then fed back to the panel, allowing them to understand the type of interventions that would be helpful and accessible to the family considering their individual circumstances, to maximise the chance of successful engagement. After the panel, families receive a letter proposing the next steps and the Community Connector briefs the family on what will happen next. Across the intervention period, the Community Connector will stay in touch with the family. Following the intervention, the panel discuss the child's case again and propose next steps based on the child's individual circumstances.

Between April 2022 and March 2023, this multi-agency approach has received 631 referrals with 461 families (73%) receiving Community Connector Support. Every child referred into the panel receives a Speech, Language and Communication support Pack put together by the Community Connectors which contains bespoke information and advice and a book donated by either The National Literacy Trust, The Book Trust or The Centre for Early Child Development.

[tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/publications/a-better-start/early-years-speech-and-language-a-pathway-to-support](https://tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/publications/a-better-start/early-years-speech-and-language-a-pathway-to-support)

### **Early Intervention and Prevention Model – Birmingham City Council**

Birmingham City Council, supported by EY as a strategic partner, have pioneered an **Early Intervention & Prevention (EI&P)** approach in light of a council-wide corporate priority to shift focus and investment from crisis to prevention. The model seeks to enable staff to support citizens more upstream, to help them build resilience and independence, with a focus on those at risk of domestic abuse, homelessness and poverty. It follows the theory that through intervening early, people are less likely to escalate to a crisis stage, leading to better outcomes for the person or family and the council are able to avoid more costly statutory intervention. In Birmingham, this whole council shift was preceded by previous work in adult's services to move towards greater investment in prevention within communities and the development of a strengths-based, locality-based model of social work.

Birmingham's **EI&P** model, which was co-produced with a range of local stakeholders, moves away from considering the issues individuals or families face in isolation, for example as simply children's services related or simply housing-related, and instead looks at the whole picture of what an individual or family is facing over their life course. It focuses on identifying both the risk factors and the protective factors that can stop a family or individual escalating to requiring a higher level of statutory intervention, with prevention focused around providing activities, signposting and support that can prevent the issue from arising in the first place.

Birmingham's citizen-centric model focuses on enabling independence and supporting citizens to be economically and socially active across their lives. Through developing a coherent



prevention pathway, the model leverages and encourages collaboration between a range of council, community and voluntary sector, and wider public sector partner services to allow people to be directed to the right place in the system at the right time for them. It also utilises the capacity in the community to offer support in more accessible and familiar settings.

Crucial to the model is a strong focus on data and insight and pooling data from multiple council sources to develop an integrated view of the citizen, so that resources can be directed to ensure the most appropriate support or signposting can be delivered. Birmingham is at the start of its data journey but there is an ambition to embed a predictive element of analytics to identify families requiring support in an automated way.

To date a key focus of the model in the context of the cost of living has been to look at supporting citizens who may be financially vulnerable to develop financial resilience and enable them to remain in secure housing, via a 'Homes and Money Advice' offer. This includes a more human-centric approach to supporting individuals in arrears, for example sending a Whatsapp message and offering a call to explore support options, rather than the traditional approach of sending a letter.

As part of this work in 2023, the

Council undertook a 6-week pilot, supported by the West Midlands Combined Authority using a data-driven 'nudge' tool to support 39 individuals and families who were at risk of requiring statutory intervention. The pilot focused on supporting access to the council's wider Homes & Money Hub offer, using customer contact data to identify where customers had applied for some elements of cost of living support but not others despite being eligible. Through proactive engagement, Birmingham's advisors were able to help the cohort claim an additional £94,000 in benefits and welfare. Modelling also suggested that 17 out of the 39 individuals were registered as disabled but not known to adult social care and through supporting this cohort to maintain financial resilience and remain outside of adult social care, there was an associated cost avoidance of £1.32m per annum.

With initial promising results, the model is showing the value to citizens and council services of a supportive and dedicated approach to working with citizens early on and in a proactive manner.

**You can find out more about Birmingham's EI&P model by watching our CII webinar, *Early Intervention and Prevention* here:**

[coram-i.org.uk/coram-innovation-incubator/coram-innovation-incubator-webinars](https://coram-i.org.uk/coram-innovation-incubator/coram-innovation-incubator-webinars)

## For Baby's Sake

**For Baby's Sake** is a programme working therapeutically with families to break the cycle of domestic abuse and give babies the best start in life. Both parents join **For Baby's Sake** during pregnancy, whether together as a couple or not, and are supported individually (each by their own Practitioner) up until the baby's second birthday. The programme's trauma-informed and attachment focused approach provides parents with what they want and need to make changes for themselves and their baby. They are empowered not to be defined by their past, and to become the parent and person they want to be. The therapeutic content and trusting relationship each parent builds with their practitioner, underpinned by robust multi-agency safeguarding, are key change mechanisms for achieving positive

outcomes for all family members. Parents testify that the 'inner child' therapeutic core supports them 'make peace with the past' while the attachment-focused parenting content, including Video Interaction Guidance, supports parents to provide attuned, sensitive parenting and support their baby's social, emotional and cognitive development, building foundations for learning, school readiness and life-long resilience. Babies develop well, emotionally, socially and cognitively, in line with low risk groups. Other outcomes include reduced domestic abuse, improvements in parents' emotional regulation and wellbeing, improved engagement with children's services and other agencies and reduced safeguarding needs. A major evaluation<sup>1</sup> by King's College London, published in 2020, found **For Baby's Sake** to be the first programme to

address key limitations in whole-family responses to domestic abuse. **For Baby's Sake** is influencing national understanding of what works. It won the 2021 Centre for Justice Innovation award for Family Justice. The programme won the CYPNow Safeguarding award for the partnership in Blackpool. Other areas where the programme operates include Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea. **For Baby's Sake** featured in two National Safeguarding Practice Panel reports (notably for engaging fathers) and in Foundations (What Works for Children and Families) reports as one of few particularly promising programmes for children and families affected by DA.

[forbabysake.org.uk/the-programme](https://forbabysake.org.uk/the-programme)

<sup>1</sup> Trevillion, K., Domoney, J., Ocloo, J., Heslin, M., Ling, X-X., Stanley, N., MacMillan, H., Ramchandani, P., Bick, D., Byford, S., Howard, LM., (2020), Final Evaluation Report: For Baby's Sake. King's College London, University of Warwick, University of Central Lancashire, University of Cambridge and McMaster University, Canada. <https://www.forbabysake.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/FBS-1165-Full-Report-A4-v1-1.pdf>

## Focused Deterrence – Home Office and Youth Endowment Fund

The **Focused Deterrence** programme is being trialled across five English cities following a £7 million investment by the Home Office and Youth Endowment Fund. The project is aimed at deterring young people from violence. The programme originated in Boston in the USA where it was developed in response to growing gun violence, with suggestions that it can lead to a 33% decrease in crime. It has been adopted successfully across the UK.

The approach involves police, local councils, community organisations, health services, schools, colleges and probation services working together to identify those aged 14 and over involved in or at risk of becoming involved in serious violence. Tailored support is then delivered, including mentoring, facilitation of education, employment and training opportunities, mental health and

housing support.

The programme aims to reduce violence by identifying and addressing the underlying causes of violence and working together with communities to prevent it. It is being led by Violence Reduction Units or Networks in Coventry and Wolverhampton, Nottingham, Leicester and Manchester.

The programme began in May 2023 and will run until August 2025, with the University of Hull conducting an evaluation of the programme across the five cities.

[youthendowmentfund.org.uk/news/the-home-office-and-youth-endowment-fund-invest-7-million-in-focused-deterrence](https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/news/the-home-office-and-youth-endowment-fund-invest-7-million-in-focused-deterrence)



## Grosvenor Hart Homes

Building on its established history in the social housing space, Grosvenor has established **Grosvenor Hart Homes (GHH)**. **GHH** is a new social enterprise seeking to improve the life chances of vulnerable children, young people and families by providing high-quality, affordable homes alongside bespoke, wrap-around support services, focusing on employment and wellbeing support. The initiative is premised on the understanding that a safe and secure home is fundamental to stability and that from this foundation, holistic support can boost individual and familial wellbeing, economic security and longer term prospects. A key feature of the model is the role of a 'Family Assistant', helping to coordinate access to the **GHH** service model and services offered by external partners, building strong, trusted relationship with tenants.

**GHH** is developing a 3-year proof of concept in the Chester area, with a small number of newly renovated homes. It is specifically aimed at supporting cohorts including care

leavers, young people at risk of NEET and 'vulnerable' families, including those affected by mental health, trauma and domestic violence. In addition, a number of properties are available as affordable housing to those on the council's housing register and as market rent properties, contributing to the development of a balanced community.

**GHH** has worked closely with the local authority to ensure the model aligns with and complements existing council priorities and processes. This has included the local authority helping to shape the suite of services designed locally and the **GHH** housing allocation process, supporting the identification of and assessment of suitable tenants via an innovative multi-agency matching panel. **GHH** has appointed specialist service design agencies, Dartington Service Design Lab and Engine Service Design, to design the range of evidence-based services offered, with continued input from both potential service users and national and local experts from the public, private and third sector. With the Family Assistant acting as a

navigator, other services being developed include mental health and wellbeing support and life skills training, as well as a jobs brokerage and employment support service, which includes a business incubator. There is also an on-site flexible workspace, the **Grosvenor Hart Hub**, which is accessible both to tenants and the wider community. All of these services have been designed to integrate with and adapt to the local context.

The model will undergo continued iteration and improvement over the proof-of-concept period, informed by service users, best practice and capitalising on emerging technology, to ensure it is delivering on its ambition to provide high-quality services that enhance the life chances of children, young people and families. Over the next 10 years, **GHH** is looking to provide more than 750 homes in the north-west as well as in central London, aiming to create a model which can be scaled for wider benefit.

[grosvenor.com/social-enterprise-7c340789406fcc48b14e0b99aff29a81](https://grosvenor.com/social-enterprise-7c340789406fcc48b14e0b99aff29a81)

## Lullaby Project – Live Music Now

Aiming to support maternal mental health, early childhood development and family wellbeing, **Lullaby Project** involves new mothers working with professional musicians to write a personal lullaby for their baby. The **Lullaby** model was originally introduced in New York's Carnegie Hall to support mothers in healthcare settings, homeless shelters, high schools and in prisons. Musicians are trained by a Teaching Artist from Carnegie Hall. Linked to a wider social prescribing programme, during the project, the parent is supported to write a letter to their baby, which forms the basis for a song which is co-developed with a musician and which harnesses the creativity of the parent. The songs is then recorded and given to the parent for their baby. Songs have been written

in a number of languages, with a diverse range of parents taking part. The key objectives are to develop parental self-confidence and wellbeing, enhance child development, bring together communities and address health inequalities. The project now works across NHS Health Trusts, with projects in Cheshire, Liverpool and South West Yorkshire, as well as at sites in Wales. Live Music Now is working with the Institute of Cultural Capital in Liverpool to develop an evaluation framework. The findings from the New York project indicate an impact in terms of reaching families in need, building connections between caregivers and babies, enhancing the child's language, social and communication skills.

[livemusicnow.org.uk/lullaby-project](https://livemusicnow.org.uk/lullaby-project)

## Partnership in Music Making

Coram Creative Therapy and the Institute of Contemporary Music and Performance have come together to provide unique song writing and music making opportunities for young people, following a donation from the Institute towards a fully fitted professional recording studio for music therapy at Coram. This rich mix combines industry expertise and therapy to channel expression and creativity where personal stories are expressed through music and voice. The engagement and excitement of participating young people is palpable and signals the need for more opportunities to be generated to support children experiencing trauma and adverse life experiences and significant social disadvantage.

### Raising Rochdale SEND Team – Rochdale Council with the Council for Disabled Children

The **Raising Rochdale SEND Team** is a multi-agency alliance that aims to improve support and outcomes for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in Rochdale, United Kingdom. The project was initiated in January 2021, with the support of the Council for Disabled Children (CDC), to create an integrated service for children and young people with SEND. This was a departure from the previous system, which worked in siloes.

Prioritising the outcomes of children and young people and in collaboration with families, the alliance has scoped out early intervention offers to identify gaps and patterns and put in

place a robust information sharing system, as well as establishing clear outcomes and measures. As a result, the number of children receiving early intervention and support has grown, and more professionals are accessing training. The waiting times for an autism diagnosis and support have also reduced, and three new peer-led projects are in development.

The **Raising Rochdale SEND Team** won the Public Sector Children's Team Award at the Children and Young People Now Awards 2022, recognising the work to implement an Outcomes-Based Accountability (OBA) approach to commissioning and enhance support and outcomes for 5,913 children and young people who require SEND support.



### Talking Transitions – A Better Start Southend

**Talking Transitions** focuses on improving speech and language skills, aiming to ease the transition to primary school for children. The programme is in its fifth year, having expanded across the Southend region. With the intention of building relationships between providers, the scheme involves the creation of a number of 'satellites' combining local schools and early years settings (pre-school, day nurseries and childminders), each with expertise in early communication and language. The providers in each satellite collaborate closely to develop and deliver a range of fun experiences and activities for children, designed to support their emotional wellbeing, speech, language and communication.

Key parts of the model include the 'Learning Together' component, involving a 10-week accredited Elklan speech and language course for feeder settings and schools focused on 3-5 year olds facilitated jointly by health and education teams. The 'Working Together' element provides

a chance for those in each satellite to have a detailed discussion about children transitioning from early years to schools, both in terms of their personalities and overall strengths and difficulties, informed by findings from the child's WellComm assessment. Following this session, strategies are devised for both parents and schools to follow, underpinned by a shared language. Lastly, as part of 'Being together' activities where primary schools and early years settings come together to create a programme of summer events at the child's new school, which focus on communication and language. At these events, children come together with their parents, carers and families and simple strategies and themed activities to support language and communication are modelled. In addition, as part of the transition, teachers visit early years settings and the model integrates with the Family Centres over the summer holidays, offering Stay and Play sessions to keep the families engaged in the programme. The school SENDCO may also attend the

Family Centre to get to know the child prior to them starting school.

**Talking Transitions** won the CYPN Early Years award in 2022, with judges commending the manner in which it enhanced relationships between schools and early years providers, equipped professionals through specialist training and boosted knowledge among parents. Feedback from participants has also been positive, with headteachers remarking on the value of transition events and the increase in attendance from parents as a result of the activity-based approach to building speech and language skills. It has reached over 1,000 families to date and **Talking Transitions** hopes to broaden its reach so more children are able to receive speech and language support and benefit from a smoother, more coordinated transition to school.

[abetterstartsouthend.co.uk/talking-transitions](http://abetterstartsouthend.co.uk/talking-transitions)



### Therapeutic Intervention for Peace – Power The Fight

The **Therapeutic Intervention for Peace (TIP) Programme** provides one-to-one support and bespoke therapeutic group workshops to young people at risk of youth violence. The programme, which is co-produced and delivered by the charity Power The Fight, takes a preventative, whole systems approach, offering a range of consultancy, training, workshops, supervision and reflective practice. The **TIP** team includes psychologists, youth practitioners and an art therapist, who all bring their own creative approaches and expertise to the programme and ensure that young people from diverse backgrounds feel able to access the support. One key focus of the project is on tackling school exclusion, and support and guidance is also offered to teachers, staff, parents and carers

as part of the programme, including, for example, cultural sensitivity training for teachers and staff. It seeks to embed a longer-term therapeutic approach across the system.

An evaluation<sup>1</sup> of the delivery of the approach in two schools and one alternative provision setting in South London over a 12 month period highlighted positive findings of the approach. **TIP** was also innovative in its approach to data collection, adapting assessments to individual children and their needs, with one approach being for a child to kick a football in a direction to indicate their answer to a question! Findings include improvements in wellbeing scores, better understanding of mental health, coping mechanisms and self-regulation and better engagement in school or alternative provision and prevention of exclusion. Improvements were also

noted in staff wellbeing, as well as evidence increased cultural sensitivity and inclusivity and better partnerships.

From September 2023, **TIP** will be delivered in three secondary schools that are all part of the same school trust which will enable the programme to be tested at a trust wide level, with more opportunity to develop the system change aspects of the work. Power The Fight continue to share their learning with the youth, education and therapeutic sectors through regular research reports that are available on the website and it is hoped that, in the future, this learning element will become more embedded through partnerships with other organisations who might want to take a similar approach to addressing youth violence and increasing access to culturally sensitive, therapeutic support.

[powerthefight.org.uk](http://powerthefight.org.uk)

<sup>1</sup> The TIP Project: End of Year Report, 2021-22, <https://www.powerthefight.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/The-TIP-Project-End-of-Year-Report.pdf>

### Transitions and Preparation for Adulthood Service – Birmingham City Council

Birmingham City Council created the **Transitions and Preparation for Adulthood Service** in January 2023. It combines the statutory Transitions Team, which supports young people with a learning disability or physical disability with assessment and care, and the new non-statutory Preparation for Adulthood (PFA) service. The combined service was developed following a successful two-year proof of concept trialling the PFA service, which demonstrated positive outcomes for the young people it supported. Young people eligible for support under PFA included those aged 14-25 with additional needs transitioning to adulthood, including care leavers, those at risk of homelessness or interaction with the criminal justice system, and parental or personal mental health issues.

Reflecting the whole-council approach which centres prevention rather than crisis, the new **Transitions**

### and Preparation for Adulthood Service

merges these two services with a new tiered offer to young people aged 14-25. This continues to offer support to those with complex needs but also has an offer for young people who do not meet statutory thresholds but have factors impacting their ability to live independently both the short-term and longer-term. This might include those struggling with isolation, poor physical or mental health, difficulty accessing employment, those at risk of homeless or exploitation. The service works collaboratively with young people for a maximum of six months via an integrated multi-agency approach, involving one-to-one coaching, goal setting, group work and signposting and connection to other services. It centres on four key areas: employability and financial independence, independent living, health and wellbeing and friendship, relationships and community inclusion.

This unique approach has been widely commended, with the PFA service recognised as an example of good practice in a recent Department

of Health and Social Care report on the importance of transitional safeguarding within adult social work. Outcomes of the PFA service included young people supported finding employment, housing, friendship and being able to better access health service and it is hoped these outcomes will be replicated among the wider group accessing this service.

The new combined service follows an invest to save model, and it expected to save the council £2.3m by March 2025. It is expected that this cohort will need less system support later down the line. By intervening early, the **Transitions and Preparation for Adulthood Service** aims to improve life outcomes for those it supports, increasing resilience, independence and economic and social wellbeing and improving quality of life.

You can find out more about the service by watching this video.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=gqCUbhoFYcE>

### YOLO Programme – Newcastle United Foundation

The **YOLO Programme** is a grassroots early intervention programme working with young people aged 10 to 16 at risk of criminality or anti-social behaviour, including those who have already come under the radar of police for carrying a weapon. The 20-week programme is run by the Newcastle United Foundation in close collaboration with the Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner's Violence Reduction Unit, offering targeted interventions including mentoring, one-to-one support in schools and communities and education sessions around the law, drugs and alcohol. The Foundation seeks to offer an alternative to young people from involvement in the criminal justice system and supports them to access the things that matter to them and that can help them achieve a more positive future. It facilitates a range of activities targeted to the specific needs of the young person, including free weekly football sessions or music and art sessions.

The results of the programme have been promising, with 87% of **YOLO** participants reporting that the programme has helped them grow in confidence, feel able to achieve their goals and feel greater optimism about the future.



### VSEND – Hertfordshire County Council

**VSEND** is a tool designed to support professionals working with children and young people in Hertfordshire. Access to the **VSEND** tool follows a comprehensive training session. The tool aims to standardise the approach to identifying needs earlier and improving outcomes for children and young people. It is part of the SEND Transformation in Hertfordshire. The tool and training are available to professionals including education, health, and social care teams, and any other professionals who may come into contact with **VSEND** through the course of their usual work. The **VSEND** tool and approach have a number of key benefits, establishing a common language when describing levels of need, analysing provision, and enabling planning of how to meet needs. It aids the work of professionals and promotes collaboration between staff and parents. It also supports the child by enabling robust tracking of progress made and supporting annual review and transition planning. The tool

allows settings and professionals to build a peer support network and share best practice and support strategies. It supports settings to identify gaps and areas for further development (resource / budget allocation, training, and recruitment).

The **VSEND** training programme comprises of an initial training session, which is bespoke to the professionals' sector (education, health, social care etc). Education settings then have a programme of refresher sessions and focused workshops provided through their DSPL Manager and SEND Lead. These all provide professionals with a better understanding of what the **VSEND** tool and approach is, how and when they might come across **VSEND** in their role, and how **VSEND** can support their role. The programme also offers a range of resources such as **VSEND** prompts and assessment statements, guidance slides for navigating the tool, and a printable sheet for parents.

<https://thegrid.org.uk/send-and-additional-needs/hertfordshire-valuing-send-training-vsendl>

## Cultural competence, diversity and inclusion

Considering the imperative to provide the best service to the diverse communities we represent, this sections looks at approaches that ensure children's services providers are equipped to meaningfully support children, young people and families from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds and embed frameworks which are anti-racist and celebrate diversity and inclusion.



### Anti-Racist Practice Lead – London Borough of Sutton

Seeking to deliver on its ambitions to become an anti-racist service, Sutton Council have pioneered a role for an **Anti-Racist Practice Lead (APRL)** within its children's services department. The role was appointed in January 2021 to signify a strategic commitment to do more around tackling racism and the impact it has on local communities. The **APPL** is

supervised by the Principal Social Worker and seeks to provide dedicated capacity to address the council's key strategic priority around racial equality, driving the Council's Anti-Racism Action Plan, which focuses on children's social care and safeguarding. An Anti-Racism Working Group supports the delivery, with the team gathering supplementary input from other means like surveys, consultation and

team meetings. The key ambitions of the Plan are to improve representation of global majority employees among senior leadership, create a work culture where staff feel they can be themselves, embed cultural competence, anti-racism and anti-discrimination in practice with children, as well as promoting engagement with the diverse community in Sutton.





**Beyond the Banter – Safer London**

Awarded the prize for Early Intervention at the CYPN awards in 2022, **Beyond the Banter** was a peer-led project, seeking to empower Black men and boys to have important conversations with peers across communities about mental health. Recognising the value of peer support to boost engagement, the programme trained Peer Educators and equipped them with the skills to open up conversations about emotional and mental wellbeing and encourage boys to get help if they need it. Although they received Mental Health First Aid training, Peer Educators are not experts in mental health but were guided and supported to safely and meaningfully share their experiences and stories to aid better understanding of wellbeing and the help available, and build resilience among a cohort who are statistically more likely to have had experiences impacting their wellbeing

due to many factors, especially those related to racism and racial trauma. A key first step of the training programme for Peer Educators was for them to receive psychologist coaching to help them understand their own experiences to better help others. Across the community, Peer Educators planned and hosted workshops, as well as working alongside community partner organisations. Among the cohort receiving the intervention, 75% said they would start having more conversations about mental health and wellbeing with their family and friends.

The peer-led approach was piloted between September 2021 and March 2022 in London. It was developed by Safer London on the background of extensive experience working with young Black men and boys and acknowledging the specific challenges this cohort faces. The Peer Educators, who referred to themselves as the ‘Mind the Mandem’

cohort, had lived experience of the challenges faced by young Black men and boys, and were recruited through an innovative recruitment process, which made use of video applications to get a feel for the potential Peer Educator as a person. The Peer Educators were also later provided with support to consider and pursue their future employment.

**A helpful professional’s guide has been developed to share the process, learning and encourage the approach to be adopted more widely.**

[saferlondon.org.uk/beyond-the-banter](http://saferlondon.org.uk/beyond-the-banter)



**In-Between Lines – at Coram**

Four young people who are adopted, living in blended and trans-national families came together whilst students at the University of Exeter to explore and examine the issues of complex identities and belonging through discussions, workshops and displays and approached Coram, through which Anthony Lynch was adopted aged 21 months, to help bring the programme to a wider audience.

The result has been an incubation partnership with **In-Between Lines** developing its website ([www.inbetweenlines.co.uk](http://www.inbetweenlines.co.uk)) and vision for an independent peer-support charity to be led by and for young people, with hosted internships to enable also the development of understanding of the issues for practice and policy and advancement of cultural competence and practice in Coram group.

Spoken word, workshop and discussion events have addressed the

different experiences of adoptees in different generations for National Adoption Week, colonial legacy and voices through time for Black History Month, and cross cultural support and life story for young people and the

next steps include the co-production of the peer support programme for adopted teenagers at Coram, and the Youth Insight Forum at the heart of the Coram Institute for Children.

Below: Anthony, Zoe and Esther and Ocean



**Embedding Inclusion, Equity and Anti-Racism in Children’s Services – Laurelle Brown Training & Consultancy**

**Laurelle Brown Training and Consultancy (LBTC)** Laurelle Brown Training and Consultancy (LBTC) has worked with children’s services to develop and embed equity and inclusion across systems by developing practice, equipping leaders and enhancing system capacities through change to find solutions to complex inequalities. All work is underpinned by the fundamental frameworks of anti-racism, intersectionality and systems thinking. Founder, Laurelle, has a long background working in and alongside children’s services and completed a Churchill Fellowship exploring foster carer for adolescents with ‘complex needs’.

One local authority project included a comprehensive Anti-Racism audit of children’s social care to support the identification of opportunities to improve systems and

practice and children and familial outcomes. Key recommendations included improvements to the commissioning and quality assurance frameworks, establishing clear metrics and goals for equity, inclusion and anti-racism, integrating these into audit, commissioning and staff training materials and processes; as well as review and development of the Resilience practice model to ensure anti-racist principles and approaches and the impact of structural inequalities for minoritised children, families and staff were referenced and supporting inclusive practice. There was also a range of learning and development activity delivered, including a bespoke training programme for the senior leadership team, a new ‘Confident conversations on race’ induction course for all staff and a train the trainer course for staff to facilitate listening circles to support racialised staff.

In another local authority, **LBTC** co-developed a tailored learning and

development programme for children’s social care managers and senior leaders to support implementation of a newly published Tackling Inequalities Strategy. **LBTC** developed and facilitated training sessions to build knowledge and understanding of managers of key concepts, and strategies they can implement to tackle inequalities, a practitioner service day to support continuity and buy-in, and reflective workshops to advise, guide and support the senior leadership team in driving and embedding a complex change programme of this nature. The collaboration has led to new recruitment approaches being implemented with positive representation and diversity results, the introduction of new programmes to engage staff and hold Heads of Service to account for equalities change and improved outcomes for minoritised children.

<https://laurellebrown.co.uk/>

**Involved Programme – Positive Youth Foundation**

The **Involved Programme** offers support to newly arrived refugee and asylum-seeking children and young people. The project, which is based in the Midlands, works with young migrants and offers a range of education, training and community opportunities to help them feel comfortable and settled in their new communities and home. This includes practical elements such as providing English lessons and educational support, but also works with children to process previous trauma and improve their wellbeing. Staff include those who have had similar experiences of migration, offering a unique understanding from first arrival and through their journey. Positive Youth Foundation also runs a 10-week summer programme called Boost. The programme allows children to develop their confidence, learn new things and make new friends and integrate into their community.

<https://www.positiveyouthfoundation.org/involved>



**Improving Understanding of Traveller Communities- National Youth Agency, Open Doors Education and Training and The Traveller Movement**

A **training course has been developed for practitioners working with children and young people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities (GRT)**, seeking to improve service experiences for this

group and enhance understanding among youth workers. Co-developed with young people from GRT communities and a collaboration between the National Youth Agency (NYA) and community interest company Open Doors Education and Training (ODET), the two-module course is designed for youth workers or those studying youth work. One module covers communities, myths,

stereotypes and rights-based practice and the second advises on best-practice approaches and provides a toolkit to those working with GRT young people, seeking to address key barriers to this group taking part in youth services.

[nya.org.uk/academy-cpd](http://nya.org.uk/academy-cpd)

**“There is also a need to improve the diversity of leadership in children’s services. Only 6% of Directors of Children’s Services who shared information with ADCS identified as an ethnic minority and, 23% of the social worker workforce are from these ethnic minority groups.”**

The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care – Final report, May 2022

**KIJJI**

**KIJJI** is a community for Black safeguarding professionals (BSPs) working with children and young people. It provides dedicated spaces to network and connect, access to learning, training and development opportunities, and data and insight that amplifies the needs and experiences of BSPs. KIJJI aims to support the progression and inclusion of BSPs to enable the delivery of better outcomes for children. The organisation has conducted research around the challenges faced by BSPs to inform wider system improvements, undertaking the first survey of this group.

An instructive report<sup>1</sup> published in 2021 highlighted key findings around a lack of fair and equal progression opportunities for BSPs as well as a sense that they faced career barriers as a result of their ethnicity. The report made six key recommendations for the sector. These included commissioning culturally competent independent resources to engage BSPs and provide a ‘safe’ forum to listen to and



understand their workplace experiences, carry out workforce audits to assess workforce equality and progression opportunities, ringfenced funding for the commissioning/employment of dedicated ‘Equality, Diversity and Inclusion’ expertise, ringfenced leadership opportunities for BSPs, investment in high-quality learning and development opportunities for BSPs as well as implementing support

for BSPs which addresses health inequalities.

Local authorities or individuals interested in connecting with the KIJJI community or exploring collaboration opportunities should email [hello@kijiji.org.uk](mailto:hello@kijiji.org.uk), or connect via [X](#), [LinkedIn](#) or [Instagram](#).

<https://kijiji20.wixsite.com/home/home>

<sup>1</sup> Brown, L., Solarin,A., and Charles,K. (2021) Opportunities and Support for Black Safeguarding Professionals. KIJJI. <https://kijiji20.wixsite.com/home>

**Sandwell Transition Education Partnership – Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council**

**The Sandwell Transition Education Partnership (STEPS)** Centre is a transition service for children and families who have recently arrived in the area and the UK and have English as a second language. The programme works with children, parents and schools in an array of ways, offering resources and short courses for parents and carers, English as an Additional Language (EAL) development for children, as well as supporting transition into local schools (supported by effective data use) and providing EAL CPD opportunities for schools. The Centre seeks to create an inclusive, culturally diverse classroom,

focusing on ensuring children can participate in a welcoming and supportive environment attuned to their needs. An initial strengths and needs assessment is undertaken so support can be put in place in schools as well as the facilitation of a multi-agency approach to support and skills development. It also supports families with other elements of settling, for example assisting with GP registration or home office liaison. The Centre supports up to 75 children through three classrooms covering KS1, KS2 and KS3. Children’s learning is structured around six cyclical Literacy units covering elements of multi-cultural Britain, as well as mathematics. All children arriving in Sandwell with EAL are required to

attend the Centre and after they receive a school place, a **STEPS** Centre transition worker supports them to move into school.

[sandwell.gov.uk/schools-education/sandwell-transition-education-partnership-service](http://sandwell.gov.uk/schools-education/sandwell-transition-education-partnership-service)



### Anti-Discriminatory Practice Training and Support for Young Black and Ethnic Minority Men Involved in the Youth Justice System – Wipers Youth CIC

Wipers Youth CIC is a social enterprise offering a range of support to professionals and young people involved in youth justice, with a focus on building anti-discriminatory practice. In the context of a correlation between unconscious racial bias and an over-representation of black and mixed heritage young men in the criminal justice system, the organisation provides anti-discriminatory practice training to youth justice teams, with topics including Unconscious Bias, Cultural Competency and Anti-Racism training. This has supported teams to acknowledge and address how

unconscious bias may shape how they interact with young people. Through providing important training, development and upskilling opportunities, the initiative is also helping to address sector challenges related to recruitment and retention.

The Wipers mentoring programme offers young people a crucial point of support to manage the transition from adolescence to adulthood, using a relationship-based, person-centred approach. Wipers mentors work with those at risk of criminal justice involvement, meeting young people at least once a week over three to six months. They engage with mentees in a range of ways, including partaking in activities and day trips as well as offering support to access local youth services and medical or professional appointments.

The focus is on building self-esteem and confidence and helping them to navigate issues across their lives. Wipers report that for 88% of the young people receiving mentoring there has been an improvement in confidence and self-esteem. A further programme delivered by Wipers and funded by the London Violence Reduction Unit, the 'Ether Programme', provides support to young black and minority ethnic men involved in the criminal justice system. This is an eight session personal development and leadership programme and engages users in issues around race, identity, self-esteem and confidence, as well as perceptions around masculinity and other stereotypes.

[wipers.org.uk](http://wipers.org.uk)



## Achieving stability for children in care

This section considers how we can ensure all children and young people in care are able to live in stable, loving homes that meet their needs and that those leaving care are provided with the support to live happy and fulfilling lives.



### Baby Box Project- Warwickshire Council Council

Warwickshire County Council provide a **Baby Box** to new and expectant parents who are care leavers. The **Baby Box** is given to each baby and includes essential items like nappies, wipes, baby wash, clothes and a thermometer for the baby. There is an additional £200 baby fund to allow parents to buy more substantial items they need for the baby. The initiative was rolled out in Warwickshire in April 2020, allowing the service to maintain relationships with the young parents during Covid by dropping off the packages at their doors. Driven by a care experienced employee, the initiative aligns with the Council's 'Corporate Grandparent' responsibility, with an intention to support care

leavers to look after their babies where they need it and allay fears among some care leavers that they may have their baby taken away. The boxes supplement a wider offer for care leaver parents, with Warwickshire putting on events on occasions like Mother's Day and paediatric first aid training courses, with specialist cooking classes to support weaning also in train. There is also a Young Parents group. The team have also worked with the British Baby Box Company, who provide Baby Box to Scotland who provide baby boxes to every child born in Scotland, to develop Warwickshire's offer, with a bigger box that the baby can lie and nap in and including a wider array of items. The local authority have now established work with a volunteer led

project, Baby Basics Warwick, who will process referrals for the team.

Warwickshire have supported almost 100 care leavers via this initiative to date, and they hope to engage more local businesses, through their baby box re-launch in January, to contribute so they can broaden the offer. The team have advised other local authorities on adopting a similar model. The project has the added benefit of helping the team to better understand the number of young care leavers who go on to have children, which has helped to improve the local support for care leavers. The initiative has both provided practical support to care leavers but has importantly created a culture of support and trust between this cohort and the local authority.

### Care Leaver Programme – Microsoft and UBDS

Microsoft, in partnership with UBDS and three local authorities has launched a **pilot programme to support** care leavers across the country. The programme aims to provide 15 care leavers with a 12-week programme of mentoring, training, and career development. The programme is designed to be relevant, responsive, and empowering for the care leavers, involving them in co-producing and co-delivering the programme as well as being actively involved in the evaluation.

The programme aims to have a positive impact on the well-being, quality of life, and social inclusion of the care leavers and their community. The programme will also enhance the collaboration and partnership between Microsoft and the local authorities in supporting care leavers and other disadvantaged groups.

The care leavers will receive guidance, support, and encouragement from a mentor who works at Microsoft and has relevant skills and experience. They will also



learn new skills and gain knowledge of career pathways that match their interests and aspirations. They will have the opportunity to participate in fun and meaningful activities and events, such as an ideation workshop and a hackathon, led by UBDS, where they can solve real-world problems and create solutions. They will also earn certifications (where appropriate) that can boost their CV and employability.

The local authorities that are participating in the programme are Trafford Council, London Borough of

Haringey, and Northampton Children's Trust. Each local authority will select and refer 5 care leavers for the programme. The programme will run from January to April 2024.

The pilot will be monitored and evaluated throughout, with the feedback and outcomes of the programme used to inform future programmes and initiatives for care leavers and other groups.

**For more information, please contact** [lorna.perry@microsoft.com](mailto:lorna.perry@microsoft.com)

### Carer Journey Design Research- Key Assets Australia

In collaboration with TODAY Design, Key Assets Australia, a foster care provider, have been working to improve the process of recruiting and the support provided for foster carers via a **Carer Journey** initiative. The project has involved research to map the carer journey, identify the key challenges carers faced and propose a response. With challenges around carer recruitment and retention, key aims of this project are to improve engagement with carers and help them to feel better supported in the role. The Key Assets Australia team have worked on adapting the initial enquiry process, putting together a Can I Foster quiz, as well as working with recruitment team to design an approach which focuses on ruling in,

rather than ruling out enquirers. In response to a sense of disconnection reported by foster carers during the assessment process, Key Assets Australia have upskilled the recruitment coordinators to become trusted advisors who focus on building positive relationships with applicants. The assessment process now involves more meaningful interactions, with a 'Midway Meeting' where applicants, Key Assets Australia and the independent assessor meet to assess progress of the assessment, as well as review training needs the applicant might have. Other features involve the development of 'Carer Information Sheets' to improve the consistency of information provided about the role and support available. There is also consideration on the use of technology to support

recruitment of carers and conversion tracking, and lead to a more seamless experience for the service and applicants. The technology means applicants can avoid entering the same data at different stages of the process, the administrative elements are reduced for staff and the service is better able to use data to improve service provision. The early indications of the project support an increase in the number of carer approvals.

[today.design/case-studies/key-assets-foster-care-service-design](https://today.design/case-studies/key-assets-foster-care-service-design)



### The Cartrefi Clyd Initiative – Isle of Anglesey Council

The Isle of Anglesey Council's **Cartrefi Clyd** initiative provides relationship-focused care to looked after children. **Cartrefi Clyd** or 'cosy homes', have the feel of traditional family homes and are embedded within communities in close proximity to other family homes. They were set up in response to a lack of suitable local placements, which meant that children were often placed miles away from home, often outside of Anglesey and across England. Children sometimes did not know where they were and felt isolated from their friends, family and local Welsh-speaking community. Anglesey County Council developed its in-house capacity through a mixture of obtaining existing local authority property and purchasing new properties, funded by Welsh government grants. The Council worked closely with colleagues within the Council and the regulatory body to make sure the model complied with regulatory standards, whilst also ensuring it reflected the council's trauma-

informed approach and that the properties felt like homes, rather than feeling institutional. There are now four **Cartrefi Clyd** homes, ranging between one, two and three bedroomed provision. They are available to children aged between nine and eighteen, with careful matching taking place to ensure a suitable mix of children in each home. Staffed 24-hours a day by a small team of residential child care workers, the homes focus on providing a continuity of care for children and ensuring each child receives dedicated time and attention. Staff operate a small rota and an attempt is made to ensure staff members work on the same day every week, to give consistency and reduce stigma children may feel, for example as a result of having different people accompanying them to different activities throughout their week.

The benefits of this initiative have been wide-ranging. Children have been supported to develop healthy relationships with trusted adults, build important links and find stability within their local

community. They have been empowered to input into the decoration of the home, choosing the layout and colour schemes of their bedrooms, for example, and having pets. Older children have been able to build their skills for independent living through a close collaboration between the residential workers and their social workers. The council has also been able to generate cost savings, with children returning from external private placements and moving into **Cartrefi Clyd** homes. There are examples where the cost to the council of one high cost external placement has been the same as two children placed in **Cartrefi Clyd**. Having previously had to travel across to England for visits, social work staff have been able to spend more time working directly with children on Anglesey, as a result of significantly reduced travel time. In addition, residential workers have been encouraged to progress through social work pathways and pursue their interest in and capacity to move into other roles across children and families services.

### Empty Spaces to Homes Toolkit- Habitat for Humanity Great Britain

With a mass of vacant, unused commercial property across the country, **Empty Spaces to Homes** provides a toolkit for local authorities, charities and other organisations who are seeking to transform vacant commercial spaces into homes for young people. Acting as a step-by-step guide, the toolkit offers practical insights into the development process, across financing, legal, community consultation and construction project management. Alongside the toolkit, an empty space spotter has been built, allowing people to identify vacant sites to create a database of properties.

The initiative is being led by Habitat for Humanity Great Britain.

They have worked with the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham on a pilot to convert two properties into housing for care leavers. It aims to house over 100 people over a 15 year period. In addition, a disused council property has been transformed into a workshop to renovate furniture for young people.

An adjacent project is also being piloted in Poland. Amid a UK housing crisis which disproportionately impacts young people, this toolkit offers important guidance to stimulate the re-development of unused assets so that communities can benefit and especially to help ensure young people leaving care have access to housing as they embark on their adulthood.

[habitatforhumanity.org.uk](https://habitatforhumanity.org.uk)





**“I feel healthy, safe, and supported. From what my life was like 3 years ago it is now much, much better.”**

**10,000 Voices: The Views of Children in Care on Their Wellbeing, Bright Spots, Coram Voice and the Rees Centre, 2022**

### Foster with North East

Twelve local authorities in the North East have pooled together to launch a new joint website, **Foster with North East**, which aims to boost fostering in the region. The intuitive, easy-to-use website, which was set up in September 2023 and is the first of its kind, makes it easy for interested foster carers to find out more about fostering and local fostering events and complete a simple enquiry form. The collaborative regional approach sees local authorities joining together to drive foster carer recruitment and chimes with the recommendations of the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care to take a regional approach to placement sufficiency. It follows the rising number of children entering care, with the North East the region seeing the most children referred into foster care. The initiative also involves rolling out a specialist joint support hub for foster carers, improved training and the development of a buddy system offering support to foster carers at all stages of their fostering journey.

[fosterwithnortheast.org.uk](https://fosterwithnortheast.org.uk)

### Fostering Connections – Coram Activity Days

**Coram’s Activity Days for Fostering (ADFs)** provide a safe, fun environment for prospective foster carers and children to meet each other and explore whether they have a connection or ‘chemistry’. The days focus on finding loving, stable homes for children who need to remain looked after under fostering arrangements. The days are designed to make young people and foster carers active participants in their family finding process, enhancing the matching process and increasing the likelihood of a successful placement. The approach provides a unique opportunity to get to know each other authentically in a way that traditional matching processes may not. It is considered to be a particularly effective matching process for ‘harder to place’ children, for example those in a sibling group, children of a BAME background or with a disability.

The events are arranged for local authorities, with the AdF service facilitating the event organisation, briefing sessions, a profiling workshop, management of referrals, consultation and feedback.

The events build on Coram’s pioneering Adoption Activity Days (AADs), which have been running since 2012, and enabled at least 1,400 children to find adoptive families, equating to a match for one in every four children attending an AAD. Coram also runs Sibling Time activity days, providing a chance to develop sibling bonds for children in care.

An [evaluation](#) of ADFs was conducted by the Coram Impact and Evaluation team and funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation and the Hadley Trust in March 2022. The findings were generally positive, with social workers and foster carers particularly enthusiastic about the approach. Many of the children who attended belong to groups that we would typically consider ‘hard to place’ and almost a third of the expressions of interest led to provisional matches.

<https://www.coram.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work-and-impact/coram-activity-days/>

**If you are interested in taking part in one of Coram’s Fostering Connections events, please contact [Adoption.ActivityDays@coram.org.uk](mailto:Adoption.ActivityDays@coram.org.uk)**

### The Landing – Skookum Kids

Skookum Kids, a not-for-profit organisation based in the USA, runs **The Landing**. **The Landing** is an emergency shelter for children entering foster care for the first time. Set up as a traditional homely environment, children typically remain here for 72 hours, allowing their situation to stabilise in a calming, secure environment at a critical juncture. It also provides crucial time for social workers to be able to find the right home to meet the needs of the child, whether it be across their kin network or with a foster family. The homes are staffed primarily by trained volunteers, often with other full-time jobs. This includes those who are keen to foster permanently but their own

housing situation makes this difficult, getting more people from across the community involved in caring for vulnerable children. There are currently two homes open as part of **The Landing**, offering care to hundreds of children every year. It is estimated that the cost of running this initiative is just one fifth of comparable group care facilities. Findings from an [evaluation](#)<sup>1</sup> of this approach indicate that children who are placed in these homes are more likely to be housed alongside a sibling during their temporary placement and were more likely to be placed with a relative in their next placement. It also suggests that where a child or young person was housed in a similar centre, the foster carer who goes on to look after

them is more likely than other similar foster carers to retain their fostering license as time goes on. The evaluation does not suggest an impact on the number of placements or the time spent in fostering for a child who is initially placed in one of these homes compared to a child who is not. In the context of widespread challenges with placement sufficiency and stability, **The Landing** offers an innovative solution to making sure children entering care are appropriately supported by the right carers, both in the short-term and the longer term.

[skookumkids.org](https://skookumkids.org)

<sup>1</sup> Washington State Institute for Public Policy (2020), An Evaluation of Resource and Assessment Centers (RAC): *Outcome Evaluation*. [https://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/1732/Wsipp\\_An-Evaluation-of-Resource-and-Assessment-Centers-RAC-Outcome-Evaluation\\_Report.pdf](https://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/1732/Wsipp_An-Evaluation-of-Resource-and-Assessment-Centers-RAC-Outcome-Evaluation_Report.pdf)

### Now Foster

**Now Foster** is a not-for-profit start-up seeking to re-imagine the approach to foster carer recruitment, retention and support. It is working to mainstream foster care, which can enable more children to live in loving and supportive homes that meet their needs. Foster carer recruitment and retention remain key sector challenges against a backdrop of a rising number of children coming into care and a lack of suitable, local placements. Working with local authorities and charitable IFAs, **Now Foster** is focused on changing the perception of fostering and the way in which foster carers are recruited and supported in a bid to expand and diversify the pool of foster carers.

Now Foster’s new service will make use of data analytics to target new groups who have the potential to become foster carers and utilise digital tools to ease the application process. It will also deliver a new

wrap-around approach to supporting foster carers which is led by those with experience of foster care or care, with foster carers becoming part of a strong peer network. In the longer term, **Now Foster** wants to work closely with children, young people and foster carers to improve the experience of care and the voice of the child within this.

**Now Foster** is piloting its recruitment and retention service in the London Borough of Newham. This is particularly focused on recruiting new demographics who have never considered fostering and need support to design fostering-friendly lives.

#### Key learning from the pilot includes:

- We need to proactively help people design a fostering-friendly life → we can do this better by segmenting future foster carers and focusing on very specific groups.

- Weekend fostering is a good entry point for new carers → we can provide a dedicated programme to step into fostering via this route.
- Some types of fostering can attract those with a family building motivation → we can make the most of the family building interest amongst LGBTQ+ and adopters in order to make fostering attractive to them.
- We need community conversations to normalise fostering → we need a step up in marketing and communication activities, particularly those that maximise opportunities for personal conversations. .
- The recruitment process needs to excite people to foster → our recruitment experience has been put together with foster carers and service designers to achieve this goal.

[nowfoster.org](https://nowfoster.org)

### Life in Limbo – Fostering Great Ideas

**Life in Limbo** uses role play to give participants a unique insight into what it is like to be a child in foster care, a birth parent or a foster or kinship carer. These interactive workshops run by Fostering Great Ideas aim to educate participants on the realities of foster care and child protection, building empathy and providing skills for advocacy. Activities include those taking the role of the 'parent' building a House of Cards, representing the attempt to develop a stable home, or those acting as the 'children' being blindfolded and siblings split up, or 'parents' attempting to keep a feather in the air, representing their child. **Life in Limbo** has run workshops and training sessions in 15 US states as well as in Guatemala, Mexico and Peru for a range of individuals; from educators, child welfare professionals, current and prospective foster carers and members of the general public who want to learn more about foster care.

[fgi4kids.org/our-great-ideas/life-in-limbo](https://fgi4kids.org/our-great-ideas/life-in-limbo)



### Our Space – Wirral Council

Wirral Council has recently opened **Our Space**, a dedicated hub offering support to young people with care experience. The hub- which is based in a building the council are leasing from charity the Callister Trust- was co-developed with young people, giving them a place of their own where they can feel safe and access a wide range of services. There is a multi-functional activity space where young people can play pool or perform on a small stage, with a sewing room where young people can create or upcycle new clothes. Regular group activities are held from the hub, including a weekly social evening and a 'Tea at the Hub' session where PAs cook a meal for young people. There are also private spaces where young people can access a counselling service in confidence, without having

to go to a clinical setting. **Our Space** also has a kitchen and washing machine amenities, with a shop on site where young people can pay whatever they can afford, with hygiene products, fruit and vegetables available for free. The money made in the shop is re-diverted back to the hub. **Our Space** also has a popular weekly Stay and Play group for care experienced young parents, who may feel apprehensive around attending traditional groups in children's centres or playgroups. The Group is attended by PAs, youth workers and the Lifelong Learning team and the parents have developed strong friendships and peer support circles outside of the hub.

**Our Space** works closely with the local college and Department for Work and Pensions, and it also has its own bespoke care leaver employability

programme called Get Real, supporting young people through a staged approach of skills development to work experience and employment. Wirral Council pay the young person's wages to the employer for the first six months employment. Other support delivered from the Hub include a sexual health service and visits from the council's social housing team, who advise on accommodation options and property bidding. With PAs and duty teams on site, **Our Space** makes it easier for young people to navigate and engage with a range of key services from one place, rather than having to go from service to service. The model in the Wirral has been particularly successful, with other local authorities seeking to follow suit.

[therightsideofcare.com/our-space](https://therightsideofcare.com/our-space)

### Prison Box Project – Kingston and Richmond Council

Kingston and Richmond Council's Leaving Care service has pioneered the **Prison Box** project which delivers packages of essential items to young people in prison. The project was developed following a visit to a young person in prison, who fed back to the team that he had been given a towel and underwear which had already been used by a number of people. The team have worked closely with young people, including those who have come out of prison, to define what the packages should include. The core components of the packages include tracksuits, socks, underwear, sliders, trainers, a large

bath towel, first class stamps, duvets, mattress protector, pillows and bed sets, a curtain for privacy, although the packages can be personalised to the young person. The team also provides young people with books, enabling them to contribute and feedback comments via letter to a wider service book club. Careful consideration has been given to the nature of the items, for example providing non-branded, plain clothing as young people were worried branded items may be stolen. Given that some prisons only accept two packages every year for each young person, the project requires the team to collaborate closely with the family and friends to maximise what each young person can receive.

A **Prison Box** is now a standard offer for care leavers in Kingston and Richmond, with the team also providing packages to young people in hospital. Some other London local authorities have also taken the project forward, with the intention of developing it as a pan-London offer for young care leavers and the backing of the Reducing Reoffending Lead for London prisons. With positive feedback from the young people receiving a **Prison Box**, the project is hoped to contribute to longer-term better outcomes for young care leavers, who understand they are being listened to and valued by their local authority support service.

### Sib-link – Fostering Great Ideas

**Sib-Link** focuses on allowing children in care to maintain crucial connections to their siblings. With siblings in care often separated due to a lack of appropriate placements, this US programme arranges regular visits between siblings, enabling them to stay in touch, retain their bonds and build their relationships. Meeting every month, **Sib-Link** organises the date, location, transport and activity, which may involve a trip to a museum or a park. Outside of the monthly visits, the programme facilitates regular video calls between siblings as well as virtual birthday celebrations. It recognises the importance of siblings bonds to child development, providing an opportunity for caregivers to get to know each other so they can support the children to retain their connection outside of the visits. **Sib-Link** has worked with 130 sibling sets and organised over 1,500 sibling visits since it started in 2015.

[fgi4kids.org/our-great-ideas/sib-link](https://fgi4kids.org/our-great-ideas/sib-link)

### Take a Breath Model- Manchester City Council

As part of its **Take a Breath** model, Manchester City Council has created two specialist children's homes, focusing on supporting children with complex needs locally. The homes were developed in view of the lack of suitable residential provision for children with complex needs coming out of hospital, meaning children were spending weeks in hospital as their needs could not be met in the community, even though they did not require clinical care. It followed lengthy inpatient stays of five children in Manchester, some of which led to court intervention, as residential providers refused placements.

The first home opened in March 2023 and is able to care for up to four children. The homes will allow children who have been hospitalised in a mental health emergency to be discharged from hospital quickly into these homes following treatment for their injuries. They will also have a hospitalisation prevention aim, as well as addressing issues of multiple placement breakdowns.

Taking a person-centred, strengths based, trauma informed approach, they will be staffed by two full time workers, who will work with children to settle them through a period of stress. The service seeks to provide short to medium term provision to ease children into the next stage of their care pathway.

There was also a financial imperative for the council to create this provision, with private providers charging tens of thousands of pounds every week to look after these children in some cases. These homes, commissioned by the council in collaboration with the NHS, will cost £5,500 per child per week.



## The Churchill Fellowship: Children and Young People with Experience of Care

For the first time, the Churchill Fellowship is supporting a three-year programme of Fellowships focused on the experiences of children and young people in care. The programme provides Fellows with an opportunity to learn from the world and explore what we can learn from global approaches to improve practice and outcomes for children 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.

You can find the full list of 2023 Churchill Fellows here: [churchillfellowship.org/tags/coram](https://churchillfellowship.org/tags/coram)

For more information about the Children and Young People with Experience of Care Fellowships, please visit

<https://churchillfellowship.org/become-a-fellow/our-current-programmes/children-and-young-people-with-experience-of-care>

the  
CHURCHILL  
fellowship

### Here we share insights from three of the first Fellows:



**Sylvia Ikomi on The Adulthood of Black Girls in State Care: Perspectives**

#### What am I researching and why did I pick this topic?

The death of Ma'Khia Bryant (a sixteen-year-old girl Black girl who lived in the United States of America) outside her foster mother's home in 2021 and the subsequent public discourse around her death, led me to start researching the topic of the **adulthood of Black girls in state care**. Ma'Khia was killed by a police officer after her sister called the police for help during an altercation with her foster mother's adult foster children (New York Times, 2021).

Adulthood relates to a situation in which a child has to take on roles and responsibilities that are advanced for their age or adult-like characteristics are projected on a child leading to higher standards of judgement being applied to their behaviour (Georgetown Centre on Poverty and Inequality, 2017). Adulthood-bias from social workers can affect the quality of care provision that Black girls in state care receive: from the amount of support that they receive from social workers who may regard them as being resilient and strong, therefore less in need of support to their allocation of housing and foster parents.

#### How did I conduct my study?

I went to Washington DC in August 2023 to find out more about the key issues around how Black girls are adultified prior to entering state care, during their time in state care and as they transition from state care and potential

strategies to address some of these issues.

I interviewed Prof Linda Burton who developed the groundbreaking conceptual model of adulthood within a child-parent dynamic in her 2007 paper *Childhood Adulthood in Economically Disadvantaged Families: A Conceptual Model*, and Sadiyah Malcolm, who has been mentoring Black girls since 2010 and is the author of the upcoming PhD thesis *Yuh Tink Yah Big Ooman?*

I also conducted a focus group with Travonne Edwards, Rasnat Chowdhury, Andre Laylor and Bryn King who conducted a study on Black children's experience of adulthood within the care of the province of Ontario, Canada and as they transition into independent living Pushed, Dropped, or Fleeing from Care: The Narratives and Adulthood of Black Youth Who Have Aged out of Ontario's Child Welfare System.

#### What were my key findings?

Prof Burton made recommendations on how professionals working with children that have experienced adulthood within their dynamic with their parents can better support them by helping them to process what has happened to them in a healthy way and leaning into the positive attributes that children that have had this type of experience develop. Sadiyah Malcolm's reflections were a reminder of the importance of a co-productive approach to initiatives aimed at supporting Black girls in state care; Travonne Edwards' team highlighted the challenges that can arise from a social work culture that does not give full consideration to the challenges that Black children experience due to their race. They recommended solutions to social care practice that can help to avoid scenarios in which Black girls are left feeling as though they have been pushed, dropped or have had to flee from care.

Sylvia is currently a secondary school teacher in London.



**Dr Lynn Snow on Post Adoption Depression – Research into Practice**

#### What am I researching and why did I pick this topic?

I am looking into **post adoption depression (PAD)** for adult adopters, and exploring what training and procedures can be put in place through adoption agencies or post adoption support to identify and help manage PAD.

This is a key issue for the sector as research suggests PAD occurs in up to 15 % of adopters, affecting attachment and wellbeing of child and adults and long-term outcomes. Sadly there have been 3 child murders in adoptive families in the UK in 10 years and the mental health of the primary carer was cited as one of many contributing factors.

#### What have my key findings been to date?

I am grateful to multiple people for their amazing eagerness to share their experiences! PAD was first described in 1995. It is likened to postnatal depression. Research suggests that there is a mismatch between adopter's own expectations of the adoption, the child,



**Ivana La Valle on A better deal for children in residential care**

#### What am I researching and why did I pick this topic?

I am exploring **what we can learn from Italian residential childcare** to inform the current debate on how to improve the English residential care system. In 2022 the Independent Review of Children Social Care in England concluded that the country has "sleepwalked" into a dysfunctional residential system. Children are often sent to homes far away from their community, sometimes placed in unregulated accommodation, and placement costs are very high. Large companies increasingly dominate the residential care market, and, as noted by the Competition and Markets Authority, some have high levels of debt, which could lead to bankruptcies and home closures, and further destabilise a system that is already very fragile.

In Italy, children's social care provision is diverse and it is the responsibility of the 20 regional governments. However, features considered essential to support a fit-for-purpose system are common across Italy, including a graduate workforce; staff pay regulated by national contracts; minimum levels of training, supervision and staff: child ratios. Residential childcare can only be provided on a not-for profit basis and is mostly delivered by the third sector.

their ability to parent and their lived reality. There appears to be some variable practice within adoption agencies. The role of health in the adoption process at placement and beyond is not well established

#### How am I conducting my study?

I am planning to travel to the USA and Denmark. In the USA, some agencies have well-formed practice which is evidence-based including using screening questionnaires for PAD, and there are a lot of online resources. There is a national curriculum for mental health professionals' accreditation in adoption. In Denmark, the mandated post adoption support from psychologists begins at placement.

I hope my study will raise the profile of PAD and encourage practice review. I also want to raise the need for health to be engaged in supporting adoptive parents, in a way that is comparable to health visitors' new birth pathway. There is a need for adoption aware/care experienced child training for health professionals including mental health workers for adults and children, GPs and Health visitors. One ambition for the sector is to initiate a standardised toolkit on PAD/emotional wellbeing for adoption agencies and adopters.

Dr Lynn Snow is a Designated Doctor for Looked After Children in Leicestershire.

#### What have my key findings been to date?

The findings so far suggest that, although Italian residential care is facing some challenges, they are not as widespread, deep-rooted and extreme as they are in England. For example, I found no evidence that children are sent away from their communities due to lack of local placements, nor that local authorities must resort to unregulated provision. Social workers typically can choose between the different models of provision, that is: a *comunita' socio-educativa* underpinned by a pedagogical approach; homes run by resident parent-figures; units for both children and their parents; and, therapeutic homes for children with complex needs. But perhaps the most striking difference between the two countries is the cost: at £838 a week (£1,497 in a therapeutic facility) a placement in Italy is much cheaper. What an English local authority pays on average for a placement, would buy 4.5 residential placements in Italy, 2.5 placements in a highly specialised therapeutic unit.

#### What key questions do I want to answer?

I want to look at why residential care in England is so much more expensive given that Italian residential care is delivered by a graduate workforce, the typical size of an Italian home is only slightly bigger than an English one and the cost of the cost of living in the two countries are not very different. Secondly, how the third sector in Italy has succeeded (to deliver adequate residential care where and when needed), where the English residential care market has failed?

Ivana La Valle has 25 years of experience in research and evaluation of children's policy and practice.

# Child and adolescent mental health, wellbeing and skills

Amid a growth in the number of children and adolescents experiencing difficulties with their mental health and wellbeing and mental health services increasingly stretched, this section showcases initiatives designed to improve mental health and wellbeing support for children, young people and families. It also touches on initiatives that keep children safe from harm, protecting their wellbeing.



## Always There for Us – Project Future

The **Always There for Us** project is a pilot programme that aims to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young men in the Bruce Grove area of Haringey, London. The project is run by Project Future, a charity that provides psychological support to young people in the UK. The pilot programme involves embedding psychologists within a youth club to provide counselling and support to young men affected by offending. The psychologists work with young men at Bruce Grove youth club in Haringey, supporting them with their mental wellbeing and providing training, advice and support to the youth workers there.

The pilot programme reported a number of benefits. By deploying mental health workers in a youth club they were able to reach young people who would not normally trust mental health services. Through using game-based activities to engage and educate young men about their wellbeing, the pilot led to a new openness about mental health. The project uniquely combined the complementary skills of psychologists and youth workers, and reduced the stigma associated with mental health. The project contributed to an increased understanding about mental health and wellbeing amongst the young men and led to them having more confidence around discussing their emotions and

seeking help. They project also provided a safe space to discuss anxieties and concerns about gangs, racism and school pressures. There is a recommendation around other mental health services providing similar access to psychological support via youth clubs.

[centreformentalhealth.org.uk/publications/always-there-us](https://centreformentalhealth.org.uk/publications/always-there-us)



## Bend Health

Based in the USA, **Bend Health** is a paediatric mental health care provider that offers virtual appointments, care team chat, and immersive online learning programmes to make it easy for children to access mental health care from the comfort of their homes or schools. The company aims to address the fact that 80% of children who are diagnosed with a mental, emotional, or behavioural condition do not receive treatment. The company's goal is to foster resilience in children and teens by empowering them with evidence-based tools and teaching them to build resilience through coaching and workshops. **Bend Health** offers a range of services to support children's mental health, including low-intensity cognitive-

behavioural therapy (CBT) based self-help to support resilience, workshops to promote early intervention, and resources for parents to help build their children's emotional regulation. The company's team of coaches are experts in empowering resilience and flexibility in kids, teens, and parents to help families flourish. They are able to listen with empathy and compassion, while also teaching children to build resilience through evidence-based tools. Bend Health's website also provides YouTube clips to support well-being.

**Bend** reports that children and teenagers using their platform see, on average, a 50% reduction in their symptoms.

[bendhealth.com](https://bendhealth.com)

**“In 2023, one in five children and young people in England had a probable mental disorder”**

NHS England, Nov 2023

## Bloom – HeadStart Kernow and CAMHS

**Bloom** is an early intervention consultation model for professionals that aims to support children's emotional, social, and mental wellbeing. It is a partnership approach between Cornwall Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, Cornwall Council, HeadStart Kernow, and other services and organisations. Operating within the framework of the Tavistock i-THRIVE model, **Bloom** is a rapid and responsive model for children and young people from 0-18.

Working across Cornwall, the project involves a multi-agency professional team (from across health, social care, CAMHS and the third sector) coming together to formulate a holistic plan to support each young person with their emotional, social and mental wellbeing. Children and young people are represented at the meeting by a nominated professional of their choice. The support plan draws upon a range of

provision and makes use of local community and voluntary projects. Each of the six localities in Cornwall has oversight of how the model operates locally, with a central **Bloom** Cornwall-wide Steering Group. Young people are also sometimes provided with a HeadStart Youth Facilitator to support them with activities and access to support.

The **Bloom** model and process underwent a comprehensive evaluation<sup>1</sup> in 2020/21, which included a cost-benefit analysis, engagement with a wide range of

stakeholders, and a data and analysis comparison report between 2019 and 2020. The report recognised the unique value of having a child-centred professional consultation model, which is agile, responsive and cost effective. A key part of the model was the involvement in **Bloom** meetings of a CAMHS Clinical Psychologist and a Primary Mental Health Worker, with a sense that without **Bloom**, there would be a greater number of CAMHS referrals.

[headstartkernow.org.uk/parents--carers/bloom-for-parents-and-carers/](https://headstartkernow.org.uk/parents--carers/bloom-for-parents-and-carers/)



<sup>1</sup> Derek Thompson., (December 2021), Bloom Evaluation: Executive Report. <https://www.headstartkernow.org.uk/Learning/Bloom%20evaluation/Bloom%20Executive%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>



### County Lines Support and Rescue – Catch 22

**County Lines Support and Rescue** is a specialist support service for young people and their families who are criminally exploited through county lines. The service is provided by Catch22, a charity that provides psychological support to young people in the UK. The service aims to ensure the safety of young people and enhance outcomes by providing one-to-one support to young people and their families, working closely with other agencies and professionals and tailoring the support to each young person's individual needs and circumstances. The service operates

alongside SafeCall, a dedicated confidential county lines national helpline for young people, parents and carers across England and Wales run by Missing People.

The service provides an out-of-hours rescue service across London, the West Midlands, Merseyside and Greater Manchester to enable the safe return home of young people who are identified outside of their home police force area as a result of their involvement in county lines activity. The service also offers specialist support for children and young people who are victims of County Lines activity. Considering the impact of County Lines on young

people's lives, Catch22 also provides support to the young person after they return home to help them to process their experiences.

The service works closely with existing statutory agencies, local multi-agency working structures and families to ensure the safety of young people and support better outcomes.

The service has specialist female and mental health caseworkers to increase awareness and ensure that the service is responsive to the needs of women and girls, and young people with mental health needs.

[catch-22.org.uk/find-services/county-lines-support-and-rescue](https://catch-22.org.uk/find-services/county-lines-support-and-rescue)

### Firsthand

**Firsthand** is a peer support programme that aims to provide support to individuals with mental health challenges and physical illnesses. The programme is based in the United States and is available to people across the country. The goal of the programme is to provide a safe and supportive environment for individuals to connect with others who are going through similar experiences. The programme is designed to help individuals build relationships with others who can offer support, encouragement, and guidance.

**Firsthand** offers a range of services. These services include one-on-one peer support, group support, and educational resources. The programme is designed to be flexible and can be tailored to meet the needs of each individual. The programme has been successful in enabling individuals to benefit from an important source of support and guidance. The programme has also helped individuals develop coping skills and strategies to manage their mental health challenges and physical illnesses.

[firsthandcares.com](https://firsthandcares.com)

### Child Safeguarding Toolkit – Sutton Local Safeguarding Children Partnership

**The Child Safeguarding Toolkit** is an interactive resource developed by the Sutton Local Safeguarding Children Partnership in collaboration with the local CCG, schools, and the police. The toolkit is designed to provide comprehensive learning resources for anyone who comes into contact with children and young people. It is a part of the partnership's longstanding commitment to help prevent future serious injury or harm to children.

The toolkit applies to all contexts of child and family practice and provides practical, online child protection guidance and training for students and trainees, front-line practitioners, designated safeguarding leads, managers, senior leaders, academics, and the judiciary. The toolkit includes animations, bite-size and e-learning modules with up-to-date legislation, guidance, and practice resources, all drawing on learning from both

local and national Serious Case Reviews (SCRs), many highlighted in the first annual report of the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel.

It also covers the new requirements to undertake Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews under Working Together 2018.

The resources and e-learning modules are based on 10 key safeguarding principles to support all those confronted with child neglect and abuse, or young people being exploited and going missing. The course details 10 case scenarios that draw on the real lived experiences of children, based on some of the most commonly repeated SCR themes.

Domestic abuse and violence is a feature in many of these SCRs. The e-learning has been split into four levels, each representing the varying degrees of responsibility and knowledge that individuals have in their current role.

[childsafeguardingtoolkit.org.uk](https://childsafeguardingtoolkit.org.uk)

### Gamechanger – Peel Interactive

Peel Interactive has launched a new project called **Gamechanger**, which aims to educate young people about crime and violence through immersive learning. The project is a collaboration between two specialist organisations, Peel X and Challenge Kit. Peel X is an immersive content agency based in Yorkshire, specialising in all forms of digital/XR and drama-based story-telling methods. Challenge Kit is an experienced team of leaders, teachers, and facilitators

based in the West Midlands, who have developed 'Learning Outside the Classroom' programmes designed to achieve a range of outcomes. **Gamechanger** uses cutting-edge technology, such as virtual reality and online interactive games, to create immersive learning platforms. At the same time, it also utilises traditional drama-based learning and the best parts of more traditional 'Outside of the Classroom' principles. The project aims to create a unique training and education platform that has multiple use cases across

the education sector and other industries.

**Gamechanger** is designed to be engaging, educational, and facilitate behaviour change. The project is scalable and based on real-life situations, and it is anticipated that the technology will provide educators, local authorities, social services, and child protection agencies with a valuable library of assets for safeguarding children and young people.

[peelx.co.uk/whats-going-on/launching-gamechanger](https://peelx.co.uk/whats-going-on/launching-gamechanger)



### Harbour – Trafford Domestic Abuse Service

**Harbour** is a service that provides support for young people who have been affected by domestic abuse in Salford, Greater Manchester. The project is a partnership between TLC: Talk, Listen, Change and Trafford Domestic Abuse Services (TDAS). For young people showing signs of or using abuse in their relationships, TLC offers a counselling service and access to their Encouraging Healthy

Relationships Programme. TDAS also offers a Young Person's Violence Advocate (YPVA) service, Children and Families Support Workers, and access to a range of peer support groups to those young people aged 5-19 who have witnessed or experienced domestic abuse.

The programme provides a safe space for young people to talk about their experiences and receive support from trained professionals. The project also aims to raise awareness

of domestic abuse and its impact on young people. The outcomes of the project include providing young people with the tools to build healthy relationships, reducing the risk of future abusive behaviour, and improving the mental health and wellbeing of young people affected by domestic abuse.

[talklistenchange.org.uk/project/harbour](http://talklistenchange.org.uk/project/harbour)

### Intensive Mentoring Service – Salus

Salus **Intensive Mentoring Service** is a programme that provides intensive mentoring to children and young people aged 10 to 16 years across Kent. The service is funded by Headstart and Kent Reconnect. It is aimed at those not accessing specialist services but experiencing increased anxiety, poor mental health or social isolation due to the pandemic. Salus uses a strengths-based approach to supporting children, young people, and their families. It deploys a range of evidence-based approaches and tools (such as the FRIENDS resilience programme) and facilitates the development of a

trusted relationship with a mentor. Salus works to understand individual needs and create an action plan to deal with these with the young person and their family. Mentors provide approximately six to eight weeks of direct support, with each young person having a conversation about their resilience and complete a self-reflection assessment before referral. As a result of the resilience support offered, children have been able to manage their anxiety better and develop their confidence. Salus were finalists in the CYPN awards in the 'Mental Health & Wellbeing' category.

[salusgroup.org.uk](http://salusgroup.org.uk)

### IT and Cyber Security Training for Young Offenders – West Midlands Regional Cyber Crime Unit, Cyber Hub Trust and The BIT Group

The West Midlands Regional Cyber Crime Unit, charity Cyber Hub Trust, and IT firm The BIT Group have joined hands to deliver an **IT and Cyber Security training programme** in Birmingham. The programme aims to provide young offenders aged between 16 and 19 with the necessary skills to pursue careers in IT and Cyber Security. The Home Office has funded this initiative. The programme is expected to have a positive impact on the lives of young offenders by providing them with the opportunity to learn new skills and pursue a career in a field that is in high demand.

### Lambeth Joined Up CAMHS Pilot

Lambeth are delivering a **pilot** with South London and the Maudsley (SLaM) NHS Trust, and community organisations (The Well Centre, Coram and Place2Be) to better understand how we can join up our response to children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing need, bringing services, data and statutory provision together.

The Well Centre is a health centre located at the Herne Hill Group Practice that provides young people aged 11-20 with open access to GPs, counsellors, and health & wellbeing practitioners in one place. The centre assesses the needs of presenting young people via a holistic assessment called the Teen Health Check. The pilot will build on the work of the Well Centre and scale and/or replicate this model to extend its availability across the borough. The pilot aims to seamlessly transition young people to the relevant services once their needs have been assessed. The two-year pilot has been developed to measure how Lambeth's mental health services can work with third-party providers to create a joined-up offer for young people in the borough, with the long-term aim of reducing demand on Child and Adolescent Mental Health



Services (CAMHS). The total budget of £400k has already been approved, and two voluntary sector providers have been appointed to deliver the pilot – Coram and Place2Be. The pilot will ensure developments are aligned with work in schools and other areas of early help and prevention.

The pilot aims to provide a seamless service for young people accessing mental health and wellbeing support in Lambeth. It aims to enable service providers to share, when necessary, the information describing the needs of the young person so that when a young person moves to a different service, they receive the best support they need

quickly and without having to tell their story repeatedly. The pilot will track the outcomes for young people accessing the services covered by this pilot to determine the effectiveness of those services at meeting the young person's needs and, in the long term, reducing the proportion of young people with severe or acute mental health needs. The main work strands of the pilot include mapping existing preventative and early intervention services and the referral pathways between them and also CAMHS. The pilot will work with third sector organisations and define the services they offer.



### Living Assessments – Wellcome Trust

The Living Assessments project is a five-year research programme funded by the Wellcome Trust and based jointly at the University of Kent, Cambridge, and the National Children's Bureau. The project aims to understand the experiences and impact of health and social care assessments on children, young people, and families, particularly those who are affected by disability or are in need of social care support. The research draws on four key sources: analysis of health, social care, benefits, and educational records from over 350,000 participants; three "experts

by experience" groups, comprising disabled children and adolescents, care leavers, and parents of those who have undergone assessments; interviews with people who were instrumental in developing the Children Act 1989 legislation, professionals who have conducted social care assessments, and children and young people who have themselves experienced these assessments; and archival research of key documents relating to the 1989 Children Act.

The project looks at the decision-making process for providing social care support to children and families, the impact of offering particular support or not

offering that support, and the lived experiences of assessments. The research aims to ensure engagement with civil servants, parliamentarians, policy makers, and senior practitioners, in collaboration with MPs and Peers from the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Children (APPGC) and influence evidence-based changes.

[research.kent.ac.uk/living-assessment](http://research.kent.ac.uk/living-assessment)

### Mental Health Model – No Limits

No Limits is an award-winning, local, independent charity that provides a unique combination of prevention, early intervention, and crisis support to young people in Southampton and Hampshire. The charity offers free information, advice, counselling, and support through a range of services available 'under one roof'. The services include mental health and wellbeing, relationships and sexuality, money, housing and homelessness, drugs and alcohol, education and employment, family, sexual health, crime and violence, and special educational needs.

The charity's **Mental Health Model** aims to support the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 11-20 by offering a personalised model for self-discovery and healing. The self-directed programme provides young people with the tools they need to understand themselves, so they can develop their inner resources and experience a positive sense of personal identity at a young age. The programme offers a non-clinical, online space that supports wellbeing through enhanced personal and emotional awareness. The programme also works with young people through drop-ins in the city centre and school, as well as working within emergency

departments. The young people engaged via this model have reported a 75% improvement in their situation as a result of engaging in this model. It provides guidance and skills for young people to trust and support themselves and to feel empowered and confident in who they are.

[nolimitshelp.org.uk](http://nolimitshelp.org.uk)



### Mindworks – Surrey

**Mindworks Surrey** is a new emotional wellbeing and mental health service for children and young people in Surrey, founded on the iTHRIVE Framework. It is provided by Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust in partnership with an alliance of NHS and national and local voluntary sector organisations, including Barnardo's and the National Autistic Society, bringing together the expertise of a range of children's organisations.

Centring the voice of the child in care decisions, the service aims to support children and young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health needs by providing a range of services, including 1:1 solution-focused support for children and young people aged 5-18 years who need help with mental health and emotional wellbeing issues such as anxiety, isolation, bullying, friendships, and difficulties with anger or bereavement. The service also provides a range of group interventions, advice, information, and resources on topics such as anger, anxiety, depression, self-harm, sleep problems, trauma, and more. It seeks to give children a choice about their options and how and where they access them.

[mindworks-surrey.org](http://mindworks-surrey.org)



### Peer Support Navigator Network – Youth Ink

Youth Ink is an involvement charity for children and young people that aims to create opportunities for work experience, volunteering, and employment opportunities for children, centring lived experience. Youth Ink's **Peer Support Navigator Network** works with marginalised young people to develop youth justice interventions. The network includes young people who have been through the criminal justice system and are now working as peer support navigators.

The **Peer Support Navigator Network** has been successful in helping young people who are at risk of entering into criminal behaviour. The network has helped young people to develop the skills and confidence they need to make positive changes in their lives. The network has also helped young people to access work experience, volunteering, and employment opportunities. Youth Ink's **Peer Support Navigator Network** is an innovative approach to youth justice interventions that has the potential to make a real difference in the lives of young people.

[youth-ink.org.uk/our-work/programmes](http://youth-ink.org.uk/our-work/programmes)

**“The majority of children aged 9–17 (80%) were happy or okay with their mental health. But 20% were unhappy, making it the top issue for children today”**

The Big Ask: The Big Answer, Children's Commissioner, September 2021



### Promoting First Relationships

Based on attachment theory, **Promoting First Relationships® (PFR)** is a brief, 10-week evidence-based, home-visiting intervention programme pioneered in the USA. It has been designed to support better infant mental health and aid brain development, giving parents the skills and knowledge to support their child's emotional and social development. A central premise of attachment theory is that for optimal growth and development it is critical to feel safe and supported. Supporting families with children from birth-5, **PFR** is unique because it trains providers to use unedited video recordings of the caregiver-child interaction to support caregivers in connecting to and understanding their child's social and emotional needs through reflective observation. The results of **PFR** across multiple populations speak to its capacity to support caregivers as they learn to understand and support their child's social and emotional needs.

**PFR** has been evaluated with a randomised control design in six different populations (one trial is still ongoing, Oxford et al., 2023);

three in child welfare (Spieker et al., 2012; Oxford et al., 2016; Oxford et al., 2023), two within rural Native American communities (Booth La-Force et al., 2020; Booth La-Force 2022), and one with newborns in a perinatal mental health setting for both Spanish and English-speaking mothers (Oxford et al., 2021). In all five completed studies **PFR** improved observed caregiver sensitive and responsive care, caregiver knowledge of social and emotional development, and a range of child outcomes including behavioral problems (Paslish et al., 2016; Oxford et al., 2016; Oxford et al., 2021) and improved stress physiology (Nelson & Spieker, 2012; Hastings et al., 2018) as well as social attention in a study of children at risk for autism spectrum disorder (Jones et al., 2017). In the two completed child welfare studies, **PFR** prevented foster care placements for toddlers in the Child Protective Service population by 2.5 times (Oxford et al., 2016) and improved permanency outcomes for children in foster and kin care (Spieker et al., 2014).

[pfrprogram.org](http://pfrprogram.org)



### Risk of Online Sexual Abuse (ROSA) Project – Stop It Now

The **Risk of Online Sexual Abuse (ROSA)** Project is an action research project delivered by Stop it Now!, a child protection charity, which looks to explore technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviour (TA-HSB) among children and young people. The project was launched in 2018 by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation and was based in Glasgow. The project worked with young people between the ages of 11-19 who had exhibited TA-HSB, to find out about the background to their offending, how to help them not offend again, and how best to put this knowledge into prevention work more widely. The project was based in HALT, a

statutory service in Glasgow for children and young people who have displayed HSB.

The **ROSA Project** worked with 68 young people at risk of HSB allowing them access to the Inform Young People programme. This programme involved 6–10 sessions of one-to-one early intervention psychoeducational support.

In addition to direct work with young people in Glasgow who had displayed TA-HSB, the ROSA Project was supplemented with wider proactive and capacity-building work with a secondary school in Glasgow. The project was evaluated<sup>1</sup> by the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ) at the University of Strathclyde. The findings of the

project include positive outcomes associated with **ROSA**, including a reduction in risk, changed behaviours and reduced criminalisation. There was also a sense that young people had improve their knowledge and grown in confidence when it came to using the internet, although there were some reservations around whether they could implement their knowledge in practice in the longer term. The intention is to use the lessons learned to improve awareness of the programme and develop the work with schools.

[stopitnow.org.uk/home/media-centre/news/preventing-harmful-sexual-behaviour-evaluating-the-risk-of-online-sexual-abuse-rosa-project](https://stopitnow.org.uk/home/media-centre/news/preventing-harmful-sexual-behaviour-evaluating-the-risk-of-online-sexual-abuse-rosa-project)

## Data and Digital Innovation

With digital and technological capabilities growing and AI-tools increasingly prevalent, this section looks at how organisations are deploying new and emerging technology to support the delivery of a range of services to children, young people and families. This is often associated with initiatives to improve the use of data and ensure data sources across services are more seamlessly integrated to benefit those using services.



### Amelia VR – XR Health

**Amelia VR** is an innovative virtual reality tool, designed to enable mental health professionals to deliver high-quality services to their patients. The platform includes over 100 virtual environments and scenes, meaning professionals can gear the sessions towards the needs of the

patient and create an appropriate, personalised therapeutic environment. In addition to boosting flexibility, VR has the added benefit of allowing the patient to immerse themselves in therapy in a unique way without distraction, and repeat specific scenes. Outside of the sessions, patients can also use the

platform to undertake relaxation and mindfulness activities. Prior to using the tools, the **Amelia Virtual Care Academy programme** trains therapists in appropriate use of the platform.

[ameliavirtualcare.com](https://ameliavirtualcare.com)

<sup>1</sup> Vaswani, N (February 2022), The ROSA Project: The prevention and early intervention of Technology-Assisted Harmful Sexual Behaviours. Children and Young People's Centre for Justice: [https://www.stopitnow.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/ROSA-Final-report-FINAL\\_Jan-2022.pdf](https://www.stopitnow.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/ROSA-Final-report-FINAL_Jan-2022.pdf)

## Portsmouth Children's Services drive for greater Data Sharing and Collaborative Working

Portsmouth City Council has made transformational changes to the way they have used their data and moved to more collaborative partner working in their Children's Services over the last 18 months.

Portsmouth's **Data Platform** went live in March 2022, with the integration of data from over 40 different systems and partner agencies to create a complete view of their children's lives and immediate families. This was the enabler to begin to use data more proactively and share more confidently.

The first service innovation added onto the **Data Platform** was their **Vulnerable Pupil Tracking Portal (VPT)**. This is a secure online portal, shared with schools. It provides each school with their own data feeds and dashboards, which enables early identification of children who may have additional vulnerabilities. This allows effective plans of support to be implemented more quickly. Children who are then highlighted as being vulnerable are discussed on a fortnightly basis with their LA Education Link Coordinator to ensure effective

oversight. The portal allows schools and local authority users to see all information relating to a child in one place, which saves users time from having to look at various databases. The child's golden record includes data on attendance, exclusions, safeguarding teams, youth justice service, exploitation levels, SEN needs and other vulnerability factors. Schools report that this is an amazing resource for them, helping them in their daily work and to keep on top of safeguarding for children. This **VPT** also now holds Early Help support plans for the child and family, through online data collection and collaboration of support information against a centralised Family Support Plan. Overview reports and dashboards allow Service Managers and the Supporting Families Team to access the information to build this into their support work.



In summer 2023, the **Data Platform** was extended further, providing fully profiled views of families across the city for the Supporting Families Team, via their own **Supporting Families (Phase 3) Portal**. This Portal can automatically identify those families who are eligible for attachment as part of the Supporting Families National Programme (within the DLUHC National Outcomes Framework), as well as families who qualify for successful turnaround status.

Recently, a **Neuro Diversity Profiling Portal** has been added to the list of services. This provides an on-line first step in identifying neurodiversity in children and young people (aged 0-19) across the city, to help establish what additional support needs or learning difficulties a young person may have.

The **Data Platform** is also the basis for a Data Science proof-of-concept project, using Machine Learning models to look for early signs of a child becoming more vulnerable to becoming a Looked After Child in the future.

The objective is to focus Early Help support activities as early as possible to prevent crisis, make families stronger / more resilient, and reduce the number of children being taken into care.

Portsmouth will also complete the implementation of a new MET / GANGS Portal, to give them more immediate understanding of children who are potentially Missing, Exploited or Trafficked, or who are linked to a gang or gang culture.

Hayden Ginns, AD for Children's Services for PCC and Portsmouth Place (NHS) says: 'The new technology has enabled professionals in the city to appropriately (and legally) share vital information about children across agency boundaries. Local and national reviews into the safeguarding of children when things go awry nearly always point to a lack of appropriate sharing of information - both in terms of the right information and sharing early enough to prevent harm. This is often a practice issue. But technology can be a major factor in improving how services work together for the benefit of children and families. For example, we learnt early on that schools do not always know who a child's social worker is. Just that simple exchange of information can make a major difference to the quality of safeguarding children.'

If you are interested in learning more about anything contained in this article, please contact [fran.shaul@portsmouth.gov.uk](mailto:fran.shaul@portsmouth.gov.uk)



## Data Mastery in Social Care – Essex County Council

Essex County's Councils **Data**

**Mastery tool** is designed to support local authorities to understand where they are in terms of their use of data and how they can improve their data maturity and proficiency. The tool was developed as part of the 'Digital Maturity Strategy' of the Children's Social Care (CSC) COVID-19 Regional Recovery and Building Back Better Fund in the wake of Covid. It is part of a wider initiative to promote best practice around data in children's social care, guiding practitioners through a survey to identify their current data maturity as an organisation.

[councildatamastery.org](http://councildatamastery.org)



## Digital Quality Assurance Tools for Children's Services – Invision 360

The **Invision360** platform offers an array of tools that empower local authorities to make improvements to the standard of care they provide to children with SEND or in care.

These award-winning tools have been developed in partnership with local authorities to drive improvements in quality for Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), EHCP Annual Reviews, EHCP Health reports (QHA), Personal Education Plans, and statutory Educational Psychology Advice that informs children's EHC assessments.

The **Invision360** tools are frequently mentioned in CQC and Ofsted Inspection letters, which acknowledge their contribution to the improved quality of EHCPs for local authorities. All the tools guide the user through a user-friendly interface, a step-by-step process, built-in checklist criteria, and examples of good practice. The technology used in these tools helps local authority teams to analyse trends, progress towards outcomes, identify areas for improvement, and evidence improvement cycles.

With over 45 Local authorities having adopted the tools, the benchmarking feature enables partners to compare their

performance with others nationally and regionally. The tools are reported to have contributed to a 50% reduction in the time it takes for a plan to be audited

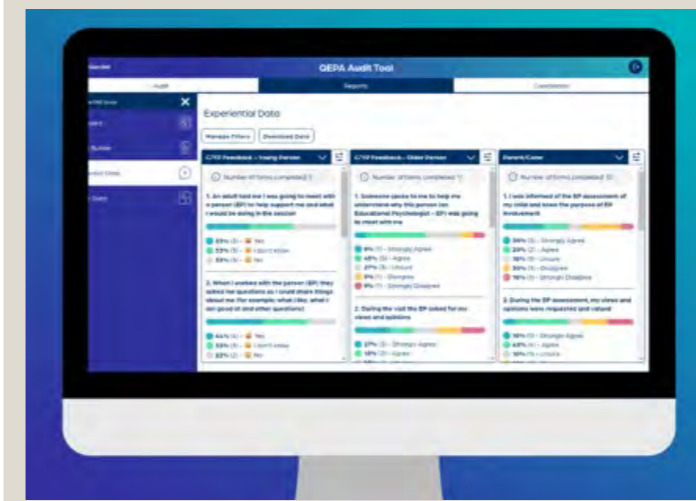
The child or young person's voice is collected through experiential feedback links; local authorities collate and analyse first hand user experiences from children/young people and parents/carers following engagement with services, which helps in building an overall picture.

**Invision 360** are broadening their menu of tools available to local authorities, with tools to support safeguarding and social care in development. Working with data scientists, using innovative machine learning techniques, the Invision360 team are also building SEND tools to further increase efficiencies and good practice.

You can find out more about the tools by watching our CII webinar, *Facilitating Better Support for Children with SEND* here:

[coram-i.org.uk/coram-innovation-incubator/coram-innovation-incubator-webinars](http://coram-i.org.uk/coram-innovation-incubator/coram-innovation-incubator-webinars)

<https://www.invision360.com>





### Digital Wellbeing Interventions for Children with Disabilities – NIHR Innovation Observatory

The NIHR Innovation Observatory in Newcastle is working to enhance access to and provision of **digital interventions to promote wellbeing and good mental health** among children with disabilities. The project seeks to provide a visual overview of what interventions exist, what they are trying to improve and for whom, aiming to help understand where children with disabilities can be supported through digital means and better tailor these interventions so they

match the needs and priorities of children. The work is being informed by engagement workshops with children, family members and carers and an analysis of the evidence around interventions and where the gaps lie. The intention is to boost awareness of existing and emerging digital interventions for wellbeing and mental health and inform and shape future products and innovation in this area, with the team able to feed this insight into innovation funders.

[io.nihr.ac.uk](http://io.nihr.ac.uk)

### Dynamics 365 Customer Service – Aberdeen City Council

Aberdeen City Council have used **Microsoft Dynamics 365 Customer Service** to improve the way the council collects and uses data to provide a better service to residents. The system has allowed social care workers to collate all the key information they need expediently to develop a clear record of people in their care, rather than the arduous task of collating data and information from a number of separate sources and departments. This was time consuming and could promote errors in the transfer of key information from one source to another.

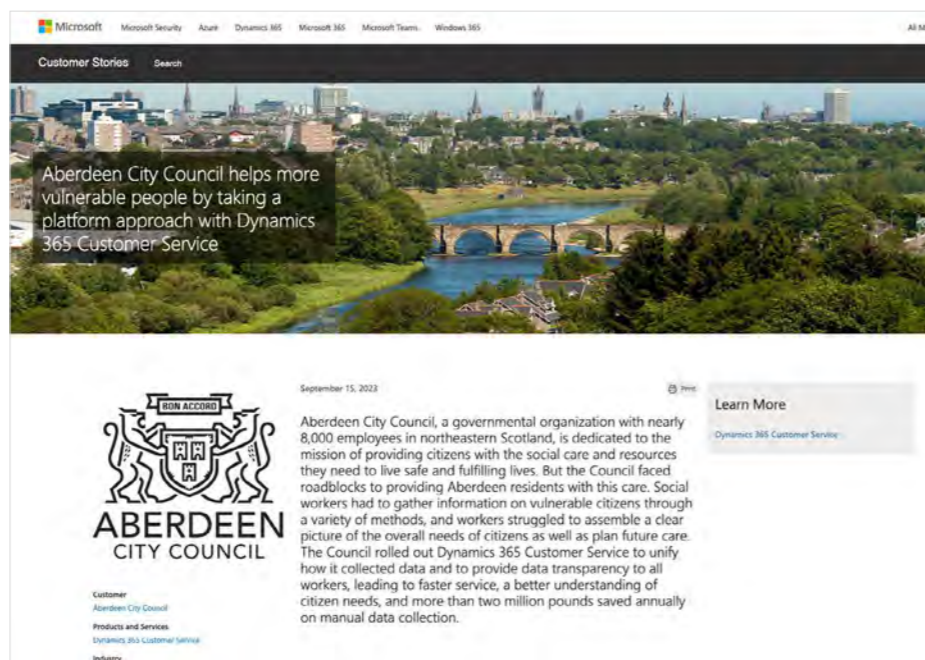
With **Dynamics 365 Customer Service**, the Council have created a central database to store information, with the system automatically able to map and update relationships and interactions between people. As a result, a cross-cutting and holistic picture of the person and their history can be generated, with police, medical professionals and other partners also able to access this.

The team at Microsoft worked closely with the Council to make sure the solution was bespoke to their needs. It is estimated that through **Dynamics 365 Customer Service**,

Aberdeen City Council can save over £2 million per year due to time and effort saved, and deliver a faster, better service. The handling time per case has been reduced to an average of 218 minutes, allowing the council to take on 11,500 new referrals and complete over 3,000 new assessments every year. It has enabled the service to be more proactive and preventative in their approach, rather than being reactive. As part of a three year partnership with Microsoft, the

council aim to add further capabilities into the system, integrating educational psychology data and providing a function for service users to add their own notes and information into the system, as well as exploring how machine learning can help to predict needs.

[customers.microsoft.com/en-us/story/1681418738558224641-aberdeen-city-council-government-dynamics-365-customer-service](https://customers.microsoft.com/en-us/story/1681418738558224641-aberdeen-city-council-government-dynamics-365-customer-service)



### Harnessing Virtual Reality for Trauma-Informed Adoption: Adoption East Midlands and Antser

In the ever-evolving landscape of children's services, the Adoption East Midlands (AEM) and Antser (Cornerstone) partnership is pioneering a ground-breaking approach to support adoptive parents from assessment through to adoption support.

Since its inception in 2019, the Regional Adoption Agency has been utilising **Antser (Cornerstone)'s immersive Virtual Reality (VR) technology to transform the adoption process**, with an objective to foster empathy and enhance understanding, particularly when dealing with the complexities of adoption and developmental trauma.

Initially, AEM utilised **VR** on a needs-led basis, assisting families struggling to connect with their adopted children's experiences and complex concepts like brain development and internal working models. Witnessing positive results, AEM's commitment to **VR** deepened, with practitioners leading its integration into assessments, matching, and support for all families.

Furthermore, AEM embedded the VR into a new trauma-informed Therapeutic Parenting Course, promoting not only understanding of therapeutic parenting but also fostering peer connections among parents. In parallel AEM developed a trauma-informed Adoption Placement Report and Adoption Support Planning process, which follows the journey of one of the children in the VR films, allowing practitioners to bring the child's experiences to life, facilitating discussion from the child's perspective.

One adopter who experienced the VR shared the following feedback:

"It was useful to get a background understanding of some of the potential reasons children may have reluctant attitudes to things like personal hygiene and hair washing. What seems like a day-to-day simplicity for us could be a genuine trigger for them. It's important to bear this in mind if any such behaviours are displayed, it's not just the child being "naughty"."

The partnership has proved highly successful. One notable case study portrays how **VR** was used to help two people parenting very differently from one another in the same household. This had a negative

impact on the family's environment and children's behaviour. This difficult situation was further exacerbated as the children had complex needs, which caused additional stress and dysfunction. The insight from the VR training enabled both parents to better co-parent. It allowed them to see things from a different perspective, moving from an antagonistic style of co-parenting to a complimentary style of co-parenting; improving their personal relationship as well as their relationship with the children. They were able to identify and remedy problems and changes were seen almost instantly. The improved environment meant their placement remained stable, avoiding further distress or trauma.

As the adoption landscape advances, AEM stands at the forefront, using **VR** to transform not only the adoption process but also the lives of aspiring adoptive parents and the children they welcome into their homes. With their innovative approach, AEM and Antser (Cornerstone) are creating a more empathetic, informed, and supportive adoption community.

To find out more, visit:

[antser.com/antser-virtual-reality](http://antser.com/antser-virtual-reality)



## Mind of My Own

Recognising the importance of centring the child's voice in their records, **Mind Of My Own** has created a range of digital tools which enable children to share their views, wishes and feelings with people who are there to support them. **Mind Of My Own** develops co-produced, fully accessible digital products for capturing voice of children. These include the **Mind Of My Own One** App, which creates a safe digital space for young people aged 8 and over to communicate their views and needs to those they are working with, and **Mind Of My Own Express**, which focuses on ensuring children with additional needs have their voices heard.

They are driving change in child centred practice:

- by creating accessible user centred products that fit into children and young people's lives.
- providing excellent customer service while always keeping the end user in mind
- facilitating a strong community of support where practitioners come together to share and learn in the



quest to develop truly child centred communities.

In the UK their apps are used across over 450 education, social care, youth justice and health services. The apps give children and young people agency in shaping how their story is reflected, providing an authenticity and supporting life story work. One young person reflected that '**Mind Of My Own** has really helped me to be able to share my voice and to feel heard... I find it really useful especially in difficult times as I can access it at 8 in the morning or 3am and write down all my worries and I can then talk about this at my next meeting or with my worker.'

They also have the additional benefit of saving practitioner administration time- an estimated eight days per social worker per year- as it reduces the need for notes to be transcribed. An OFSTED report in Sunderland reflected that the tool was effective in terms of supporting return home interviews after children go missing, as well as involving younger children in care planning. In addition, **Mind Of My Own** have a number of other apps designed to boost engagement with young people and their families.

[mindofmyown.org.uk](http://mindofmyown.org.uk)

## Modern Data Platform: Single Front Door for Children and Young Persons Information and SEND Cost Insights – Suffolk County Council

Suffolk County Council has been working with Simpson Associates, a data analytics company, to develop a new **Modern Data Platform** which is single front door system for children and young people, focused on supporting Suffolk's SEND strategy. Based on a Microsoft Azure Synapse data platform, the system enables the council to track costs relating to children with SEND and scope future costs. Previously, staff at the council were required to navigate various disparate systems to find the information they needed about

a child, which was time consuming. Their **Modern Data Platform** provides a single view of the child which integrates their engagement across systems and joins up and merges data across various council systems. This means an accurate and comprehensive version of a child's records can be easily and efficiently accessed. It is linked to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub. The aim is to use the insights from this to enhance service delivery and safeguarding practices as well as improving sufficiency planning.

**“Better case management systems can make a significant difference to time away from practice.”**

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care – Final report, May 2022

## Reimagining Case Management Systems: The North Yorkshire Approach

North Yorkshire Council are pursuing an innovative pilot project exploring how a new technology solution could help to **improve children's services case management to support social workers to keep children safe**. The project is being funded by the Department for Education's Children's Social Care Digital and Data Solutions Fund and supported by the CII and partners at Microsoft and Simpson Associates.

Local authorities have to navigate a mass of data and information as they seek to ensure the children in their care are able to receive the best possible support. This can be complex and time-consuming, taking social workers away from vital time spent with children and families. North Yorkshire's case management solution seeks to address these challenges.

Using analytics tools, the system will be able to efficiently search and analyse data and information across different sources and systems so that children's services providers have immediate and easy access to the key information about a child or family at the click of a button. The semantic search function can importantly operate across both structured data sources and unstructured data, for example written case notes or written assessments, and extract the key elements for the user.

The team at North Yorkshire have also been keen to target the tool towards creating comprehensive genograms and ecomaps, which will provide a map of the important people and places in a child's life, and help identify those who can help to keep a child safe and those who may pose a risk. This will assist social workers to take better, more proactive decisions to protect local children, and also help to keep children connected to their local, community networks. This could have a transformative impact for children going into the care system, for example, by making social workers aware of a neighbour or a family friend who the child knows and trusts and who could provide care to the child for a period of time.

In addition, North Yorkshire is looking at how it can utilise existing smart technology to create fit-for-purpose systems designed for the social workers of today and the future, for example exploring the potential for voice notes to become a key part of how practitioners record information about a child.

In order to create a tool that works for children, families and practitioners, the Council has conducted extensive user research work to inform development, including garnering an understanding of difficulties with existing case management systems, the key features local

Working in partnership with



**coram.i**  
Insight • Innovation



authorities would welcome in a case management system and exploring potential use cases for the tool both within and beyond children's social care. The team have also shared key learning from the project along the way, especially to support other teams to negotiate complexities around data and information sharing.

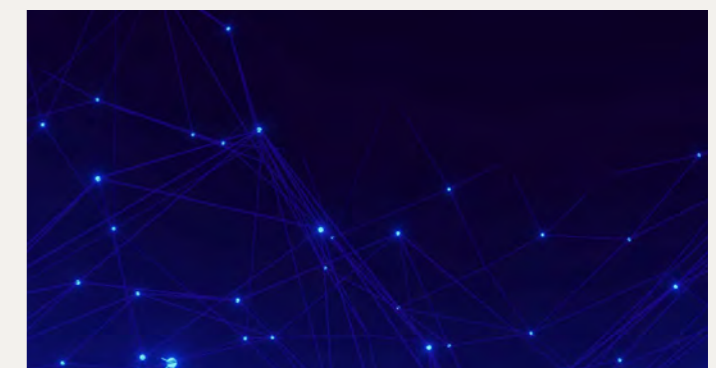
The team are aiming for a prototype tool to be available in early 2024, which will be piloted with service users and tweaked according to feedback. The aim is for a revised product to be produced by spring 2024, alongside a guidance framework, evaluation and recommendations paper.

The potential of this tool is vast, with opportunities identified including supporting those children and young people at transition points in the sector, enabling a comprehensive single view of the child and helping services to better understand trends and patterns and translate these into service improvements.

Pioneered in North Yorkshire, the intention is for the project to contribute to wider policy improvements and for the tool to become something that can be readily adopted by other local authorities and services to scale the transformative impact for children, young people and families.

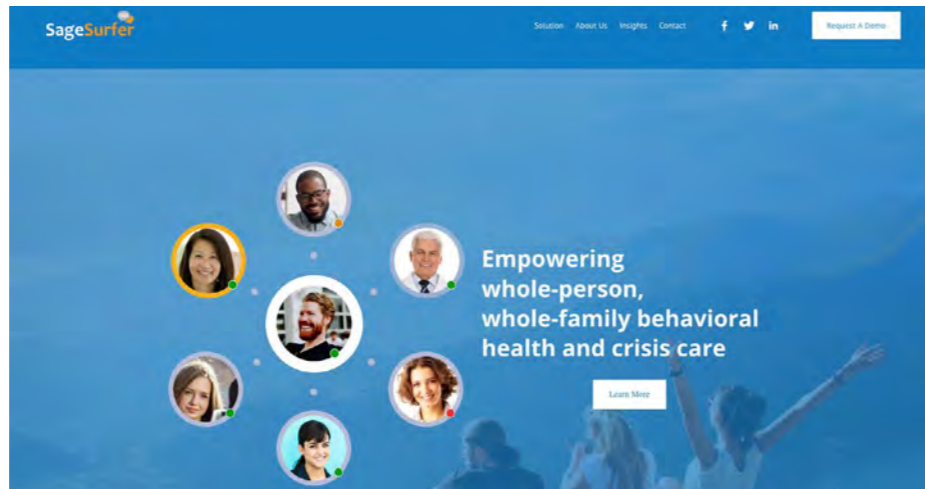
You can watch the CII webinar series with North Yorkshire council following the development of this exciting project here:

[coram-i.org.uk/coram-innovation-incubator/coram-innovation-incubator-webinars](http://coram-i.org.uk/coram-innovation-incubator/coram-innovation-incubator-webinars)



### SageSurfer

**SageSurfer** is a digital care coordination platform, focused on behavioural and mental health care. This patient-centred, team-based model aims to make it easier for patients, families, healthcare providers and community support providers to communicate and ensure that necessary actions are taken to support the patient's care plan. Creating a unique care team involving healthcare providers, the patient and the patient's own community of peers, family and friends, this AI-driven tool is integrated with health records, and supports professionals to monitor progress between visits and identify and manage risk. Patients receive an assessment and can be directed towards self-care activities and local support via the tool. They



can also communicate directly with their health care team via video, audio or a chat function. Personalised to the patient, it is able to support patients with complex mental health issues but **SageSurfer** also work closely with schools and universities to build care teams from an early stage in a

patient's journey. The app is currently being used with around 4000 patients and **SageSurfer** estimates that the tool reduces emergency department visits by 35%, with patient engagement rates between 85-90%. [sagesurfer.com](https://sagesurfer.com)

### SCARF Live Online – Coram Life Education

Delivered by Coram Life Education (CLE), **SCARF Live Online** provides online, live workshops to children aged between 3-11 years old. These interactive, engaging workshops, which are streamed into classrooms using Zoom, help children to understand how they can keep their body healthy and look after their emotional wellbeing and mental health. They can be tailored according to the needs of the school

but may include education on healthy foods, the importance of physical activity, understanding how to deal with feelings and how to be aware of and check their emotional needs to support mental wellbeing.

**SCARF Live Online** complements CLE's wider SCARF programme and resource bank, which is used by over 50,000 teachers across the country and supports PSHE and wellbeing education in primary schools in line with DfE requirements. By pivoting

to online delivery through these innovative workshops, schools were able to continue to benefit from SCARF resources during the pandemic, with **SCARF Live Online** reaching 763 schools between September 2020 and June 2023 and working with over 132,000 children.

**SCARF Live Online** has been nominated in the CYPN Awards Digital Innovation category 2023, which recognises projects that use digital platforms and technologies to deliver effective interventions and strengthen relationships with service users.

For more information and if you'd like to explore what SCARF can offer in your local area, please contact [cle@coram.org.uk](mailto:cle@coram.org.uk)

<https://www.coramlifeeducation.org.uk/scarf/live-online-for-teachers>



**Your SCARF teaching resources**

SCARF suggested half-termly units and related assessments

SCARF calendar plans

SCARF assemblies

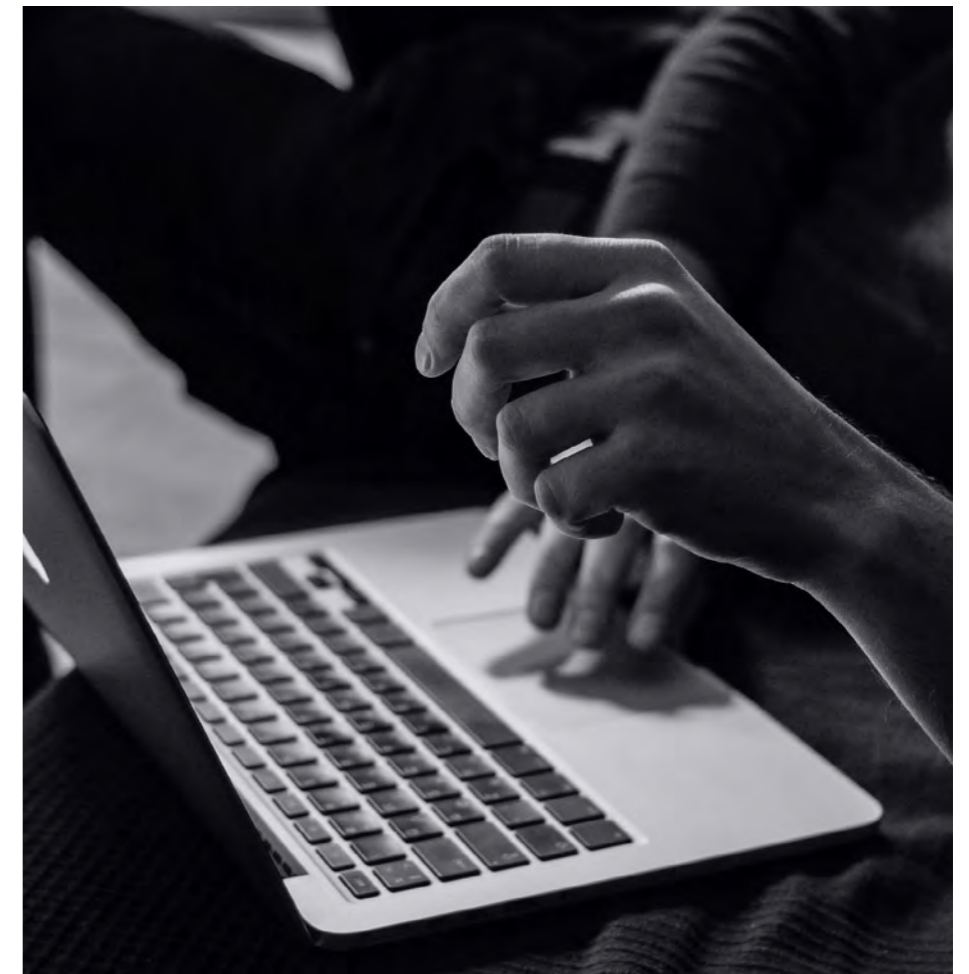
**Your SCARF Supporting resources**

SCARF Planning templates and tools

### SilverCloud – Amwell

**SilverCloud** by Amwell is a digital platform offering evidence-based mental health, wellbeing and behavioural support to children and young people and their families. With the content aligned to NICE guidelines and co-produced with children, the platform encompasses the prevention, assessment and treatment phases of the mental health experience and has been used as part of a wider CAMHS offer. The platform has tailored programmes for children aged between 5 and 18, with a number of modules, each with interactive content providing advice, exercises and hints and tips for managing anxiety and low mood. **SilverCloud** report that up to 65% of its users have achieved a clinically significant improvement in their symptoms.

In 2023, there was an [evaluation<sup>1</sup>](#) of the use of a digital CBT service in Ireland and one component of the service was the use of **SilverCloud**. The study reported that the digital CBT tool was associated with reductions in symptoms related to anxiety and depression, albeit across a wider age group above age 18. **SilverCloud** was also delivered to children and young people across Cumbria charity Carlisle Eden Mind, with findings that the use of platform



has helped the service to reach three times as many children and young people. In this service, **SilverCloud** is used in addition to face-to-face support where it is appropriate for the child or young person, and the platform has enabled them to support around 90 children, whereas through previous methods it was

around 30. Amid lengthy CAMHS waiting lists, **SilverCloud** offers important interim support to help young people manage their symptoms and enable services to access and help a larger number of young people.

[silvercloudhealth.com](https://silvercloudhealth.com)

<sup>1</sup> Harty, S., Enrique, A., Akkol-Solakoglu, S., Adegoke, A, Farrell, H., Connon, G., Ward, F., Kennedy, C., Chambers, D., Richards, D (2023), Implementing digital mental health interventions at scale: one-year evaluation of a national digital CBT service in Ireland. *International Journal of Mental Health*. <https://www.silvercloudhealth.com/hubfs/Our%20Research/Research%20papers/HSE-paper-20203.pdf>

### Teams Youth App – State of Illinois, Department of Children and Family Services

The **Teams Youth App** was created by Microsoft in collaboration with the Department of Children and Family Services in the Illinois. The App helps children, young people, families, caseworkers and other partners involved in the case to better communicate with each other. By creating a trusted platform

where all the relevant parties can be contacted at once, the App helps each party to coordinate services and support for children and young people more efficiently and reliably. Families can post questions on the app that the social worker can respond to on the go, even if they're not in the office. On a practical level, social workers can save administrative time by coordinating meetings in one place, meaning they

can focus on different areas of their practice. Importantly, the app can also empower young people to communicate with their team in a more accessible and less threatening way. Feedback from all stakeholders has been positive and demonstrates the value of rethinking how we can apply existing technology for a greater benefit.

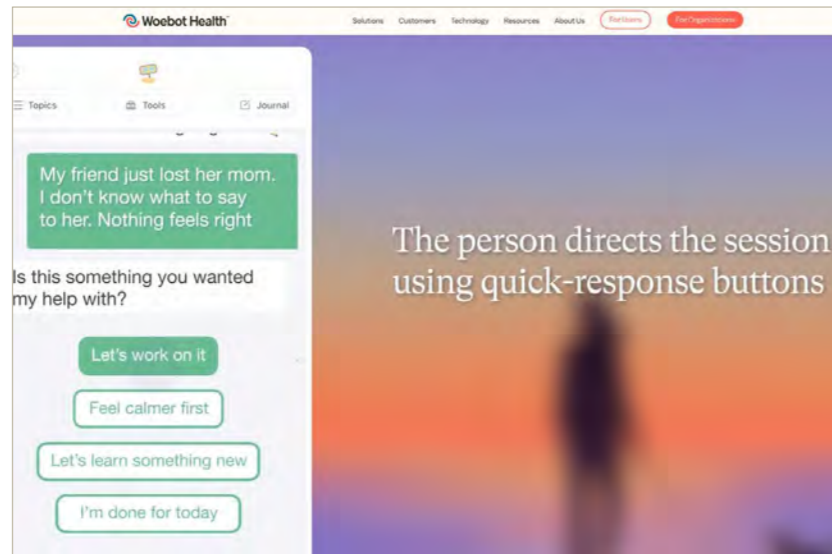
[youtube.com/watch?v=filaolf4FMI](https://youtube.com/watch?v=filaolf4FMI)



## TRACS

**TRACS**- or the Timeline Route and Certification System- is a digital solution which aims to improve care planning for looked after children and enhance longer term outcomes. The tool was developed by children's services professionals and technology experts in 2020, focused on supporting local authorities to better meet their obligations to those in care and care leavers around preparing for successful independence. Hosted on a secure cloud platform, **TRACS** helps professionals and young people to schedule, track and prioritise key activities for completion. This co-produced approach between young people and their worker empowers young people to play an active role in their care and skills development. The tool creates a visual timeline demonstrating a young person's status and progress, which can be viewed by professionals, management, parents/ carers and young people, creating transparency and accountability in the process. Automated email reminders also notify professionals of upcoming activities they need to complete for a young person. It aims to enhance joint working procedures by streamlining the process for updating other stakeholders, meaning young people can be supported to access relevant services or interventions in a more timely manner. On a wider level, the insights derived can inform broader service improvements and highlight key areas of focus for the service as a whole. **TRACS** is currently being piloted in Southampton over a 6-month period. It is a promising model for using simple technology to improve the experience and efficiency of services for young people at a critical juncture in their journey towards independence.

tracsuk.org



## Woebot

**Woebot** is a digital platform used to support people with their mental health. Described as a 'personal mental health ally' and based on CBT theory, **Woebot** uses AI natural language processing to provide a space to talk about mental health and wellbeing at the click of a button, whenever it suits the user. It was developed by clinical research psychologist Alison Darcy.

With regular conversations and check-ins, **Woebot** is able to gain an insight into the person and their challenges, and provide personalised advice and guiding them towards suitable clinically tested tools and tactics. This

advanced chatbot acknowledges the sentiment and provides encouraging, empathetic and personalised responses and shares practical tips and techniques, for example, around mother and baby bonding. The app is currently only available in the USA but data on its impact is promising. A Stanford University [study](#)<sup>1</sup> indicated that the app supported a reduction in anxiety and depression among those aged 18-65 years old compared to the control group. The company is currently in the process of devising treatments specifically designed for teenagers with a diagnosis of mild to moderate depression and new mothers facing post-partum mental health.

<https://woebothealth.com>

<sup>1</sup> Prochaska JJ, Vogel EA, Chieng A, Kendra M, Baiocchi M, Pajarito S, Robinson A, (2021) A Therapeutic Relational Agent for Reducing Problematic Substance Use (Woebot): Development and Usability Study, *J Med Internet Res*;23(3):e24850. <https://www.jmir.org/2021/3/e24850>

**“To help protect children, we need to ensure that –when practitioners make decisions on crucial issues and under pressure – they are equipped with the best available information in a timely way and that this information is easy to understand.”**

Child Protection in England: National Review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson, The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, May 2022

## 2 ways technology can help reduce the admin burden for social care professionals

by Kenya McKenzie-Jones, Senior Digital Strategist, Microsoft

Imagine if you could spend more time in direct work with children and young people? In a recent survey, more than half of Social Workers felt they didn't have enough time to spend with service users, with high administrative loads cited as a major source of stress<sup>1</sup>. How can you harness the power of technology to reduce your admin burden?



**Microsoft 365 Copilot** is integrated into the apps you already use every day, freeing you to focus on the most important work and less on the busy work. Agencies like the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services are already using Microsoft Teams to better collaborate with children, families and case workers. Taking this one step further, **Microsoft 365 Copilot** can work alongside care professionals to unlock productivity. Here's 2 ways **Copilot** can free up time and effort for social care professionals:

- 1. Report writing.** Get help drafting your supervision notes and inspection reports – no need to start from scratch. **Copilot** in Word writes, edits, summarises, and creates right alongside you. With only a brief prompt, **Copilot** in Word will create a first draft for you, bringing in information from across your organisation as needed. **Copilot** can add content to existing documents, summarise text, and rewrite paragraphs to make it more concise.

<sup>1</sup> BASW launches first annual survey of membership, revealing what social workers want to overcome current challenges | [www.basw.co.uk](http://www.basw.co.uk)

- 2. Multi-agency collaboration.** Need help keeping track of emails across your multi-disciplinary teams? **Copilot** in Outlook works with you in your inbox and messages so that you can spend less time on email triage and more time on communicating – better, faster, and more easily. Summarise lengthy, convoluted email threads with multiple people, and quickly find open questions that have yet to be answered. Respond to an existing email with a simple prompt, or turn quick notes into crisp professional messages.

The responsible use of AI technology can free up time and effort for Social Care teams, creating more capacity for direct work. **Microsoft 365 Copilot** is guided by AI principles and Responsible AI Standard, designed to put the human user in control.

**Find out more today: Microsoft 365 Copilot.**

[Learn more about how Microsoft technology can support social care professionals.](#)

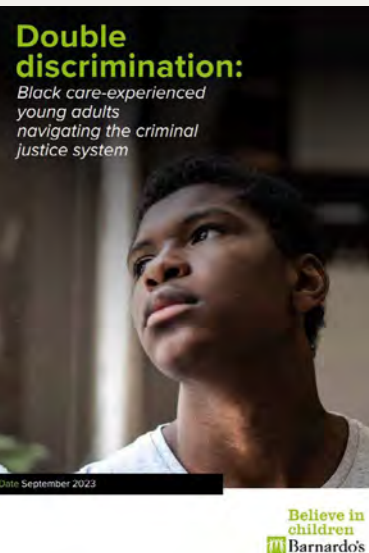
[Small Business Software | Microsoft Teams](#)



# Improving the Lives of Children and Young People: The Barnardo's Approach

Across Barnardo's there is a strong drive for systemic change to facilitate better outcomes for children and young people across a number of domains.

Below we highlight a number of key strands of work and research across two organisational Core Priority areas: **Care Journeys** and **Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation**.



## Double Discrimination

**Double Discrimination: Black care experienced young people navigating the criminal justice system**, was commissioned by Barnardo's Care Journeys and, conducted by Listen Up, to hear from Black care experienced young people in prisons about their experiences navigating the criminal justice system. The report presents a challenge, that 'we cannot hide the obvious and nor should you', with a key finding being that racism was the major determinant in the lives of 20 out of the 22 Black care experienced young people who contributed to the research. The findings outline that Black care experienced young people are subject to a double whammy of discrimination linked to the colour of their skin and their time in care. This intersection was rarely factored into their support and not recognised. This results in Black care experienced young people facing greater hardship than their White peers when navigating life, care and importantly, the criminal justice system.

## Care Journeys

By Rod Weston-Bartholemew, Assistant Director: Impact Care Journeys

Care Journeys is one of Barnardo's Core Priority Programme areas and was established to look at systemic changes in the Care system to improve outcomes for children and young people who journey through and out of it. Some key practical successes of this strand of work are outlined below:



Recommendations from the report are; (1) improve the experiences of Black children in foster care; (2) improve access to mental health support for Black children in care; (3) take action to reduce the over-criminalisation of children in the care system; (4) improve understanding across agencies of the needs of children in care and care-experienced young people as well as providing training on how to better address these need and (5) ensure a renewed emphasis on implementing reform aimed at tackling institutional racism within the criminal justice system.

The Barnardo's report was launched in partnership with Manchester Metropolitan Universities, who had produced a unique quantitative report 'Care Experience, Ethnicity and Youth Justice Involvement: Key Trends and Policy Implications, each supported respective findings. Following this, a parliamentary roundtable was held chaired by Barnardo's Vice President Baroness Floella Benjamin to discuss the report's findings and put forward recommendations to politicians and key decision makers.

Double Discrimination - Black care-experienced young adults navigating the criminal justice system report.pdf ([barnardos.org.uk](https://barnardos.org.uk))

## Care Crates

**Care Crates** is an initiative driven by care experienced young people with an aim to put the 'care back into the care system'. It focused on the key issue that young people did not have the right resources to hand when leaving the care system. The initiative attracted the attention of Ikea, a Barnardo's corporate partner at the time, who invested £50,000 to enable **Care Crates** to be disseminated across all four nations to Barnardo's services that support those leaving care. The **Care Crates** provide

some key essentials when setting up a home, but also some more sentimental items, like a personalised card, a book that someone has personally recommended and a phone card to allow the young person to keep in touch with those important to them. **Over 200 Care Crates** have been sent to services and an evaluation is planned in early 2024 to measure impact. Initial feedback from young people is that they are making a difference during what many experience as a difficult transition in their lives when leaving care. The initiative was nominated and shortlisted for a Better Society Award, which evidenced the future potential and relevance of this initiative.

## Walk a day in my shoes

**Walk a day in my shoes** is a creative art installation which depicts the real lives of care experienced young people. Care experienced young people taking part in the initiative were asked to design a shoe, which was then placed on a display board with a QR code next to it. By scanning the QR code the person can find out more about that person's story and their authentic view of their care journey, as told by them. It captures how unique each person's journey is to highlight why every child and young person should be treated as an individual and not simply a 'looked-after' child. This installation has the potential to raise levels of awareness and change practice as well as give care experienced young people a platform to challenge the misconceptions that can often surround them.

<https://plymouth.carejourneys.org.uk/walk-in-our-shoes-not-one-size-fits-all/>

## Parent-focused pre-birth assessments

Barnardo's Brent Care Journeys has worked with care experienced young people, NHS and local authority staff to create a **pre-birth assessment** that focuses on the unique strengths of care experienced parents and removed the negative stigma which can impact on their experiences. This work captured the frustrations of young parents, who wanted to have their dreams and aims and ambitions for their families heard. The assessment tool has been adopted by Brent Council's Social Care Team.

It follows research by Care Journeys Future Pathways, which found that care experienced parents were poorly supported during pregnancy, often judged and stigmatised by professionals, they struggled to access support akin to that provided an extended family, and they also found it difficult to get mental health support. The report which followed the research presented a range of recommendations including the creation of family hubs; enabling care experienced parents to create their own 'villages' of support, extending corporate parenting to more public bodies such as the NHS and Police and greater access to mental health support.

## Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

By Suzanne Taylor, Assistant Director Impact – Child Sexual Abuse & Exploitation

Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation is another Barnardo's Core Priority Programme areas, seeking to support children and young people who have been or are vulnerable to child sexual abuse or exploitation.

Some key strands of work in this area have been highlighted below:

## Voices Mean Choices – East Riding of Yorkshire Strategic Partnership

**Voices Mean Choices** is a strategic partnership between Barnardo's and East Riding of Yorkshire Council. This place-based systems change partnership aims to eradicate child and parent blaming practice and to identify and support children who are exploited at the earliest opportunity. Since our launch in 2022, we have listened to nearly 100 children and parents' experiences and over 150 professionals across the partnership. This visual illustrates the summary of what the children and families told us they need:

We have used animation to amplify the experiences of children and families. The animations describe in their own words children's and parents' experiences of seeking support. The animations have been used across the partnership to support the start of systemic change.

You can listen to Dan's story of feeling blamed when he was exploited: <https://vimeo.com/841831187/1de01a208a?share=cop> an find out more about the partnership here [East Riding of Yorkshire and Barnardo's Child Exploitation Collaboration 2022-25 \(erscp.co.uk\)](https://www.eastridingofyorkshire.gov.uk/child-exploitation-collaboration-2022-25).



**“At Barnardo’s we are really pleased to be working with Coram as a key partner to help improve the services that we deliver and the ways in which we engage.”**

Jon Brown, Director of Strategic Partnerships, Barnardos



### Child Exploitation Collaboration: Bristol Strategic Partnership

Bristol Child Exploitation Collaboration is a partnership with Bristol City Council to co-design specialist services for children who have been exploited or affected by community violence. In 2022, we conducted research with children who have been exploited and their families, along with the professionals who support them. This research, which forms the foundation for the co-design of a new exploitation service, focused on children’s lived experiences of services and how they think the services and systems can improve to keep them safe and support them into adulthood. 98 children, families and professionals shared their experiences of navigating multiple systems and services focussing how this negatively affects them and, importantly, where practice was getting this right.

The Institute of Public Care at Oxford Brookes University completed an insightful and supportive [evaluation](#)<sup>1</sup> of our partnership. It highlights our work in gaining the voices of young people as ‘gold standard’ and including the voices of a wide range of stakeholders underpinning the value, power and credibility of the process. Our work identified 11 opportunities for change which are the basis for the new service.

Based on the children’s experiences we created the ‘Here I am’ an immersive 360-degree film. It is aimed at commissioners and decision makers to ensure the child’s voices and experiences are central to decision making. You can watch the film here:

[Here I Am - YouTube](#)

### Exploited and Criminalised comic

In collaboration with Penificent, a social enterprise that creates comic books and workshops that tackle social issues by taking inspiration from their lived experience growing up in London, we created **Exploited and Criminalised**. The story is based on Barnardo’s experiences of witnessing how young men who experience

exploitation are regularly criminalised rather than identified as victims of exploitation. Therefore, they do not receive the support they need to recover. The idea was prompted by Barnardo’s 2019 Policy report of the same name and supports our calls for a statutory definition and consistent data collection on criminally exploited children. The comic is aimed at young people to open conversations and to amplify the issues of exploitation.

### Child Sexual Abuse Centre of Expertise Practice Leads Programme Pilot

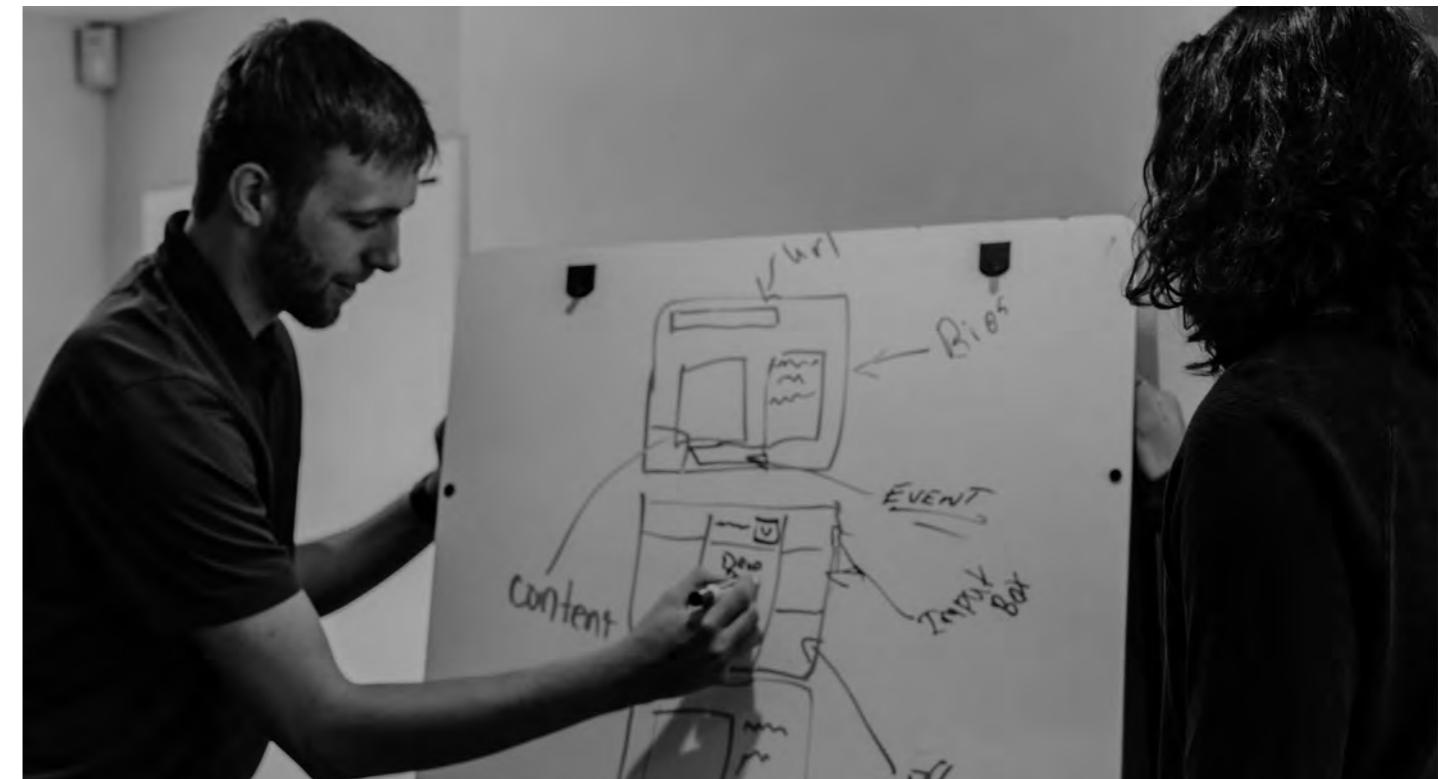
In collaboration with the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse (CSA Centre), Barnardo’s has piloted the delivery of the CSA Centre’s Child Sexual Abuse Practice Leads Programme to their non- CSA specialist children’s workforce. This intensive training course builds the confidence and competence of safeguarding professionals in managing child sexual abuse cases. On completion of the training, the participants become practice leads on child sexual abuse for their service or locality. Barnardo’s believes that all professionals working with children and families require the knowledge, skills and confidence to be able to spot the signs of sexual abuse and act appropriately. We wanted to test solutions to the training and development challenge across our local, regional and national teams. The first 44 staff to complete the course and the evaluation to date have shown excellent engagement and satisfaction. Attendance was over 70% on a 10-day course and participants reported that the programme enabled them to feel more “empowered” “confident”, able to “promote consistent child focused practice” and to “ensure all staff have the confidence and knowledge to hold all aspects of child safety”. A further 66 participants are due to complete the programme before 2025.

Find out more here:

<https://www.csacentre.org.uk/training-events>

## Workforce and Organisational Development

This section considers approaches being trialled to support workforce and organisational development to ensure children’s services can recruit and retain high-quality staff across their services and empower staff with a workplace environment which values them.



### Care Friends

**Care Friends** is an employee referral app that aims to support finding and retaining high-quality care staff in the social care sector. The app was launched in partnership with Skills for Care and is available on both web and mobile platforms. The app allows staff to refer their friends for job opportunities at the tap of a button, share job roles directly with their contacts or on social media, and recognise and reward staff. With an incentives scheme, referrers receive rewards as the person they have referred moves through the recruitment process

into employment. The app also provides a leaderboard feature that makes collecting points fun and competitive. Each point converts to £1, which is paid through payroll. **Care Friends** has been shown to support recruitment and retention of high-quality staff, with the app leading to five times more referrals than traditional means of recruitment. This method of recruitment also leads to an estimated 50% lower year one attrition rate than the sector average, due to greater staff suitability. It has also brought a new, diverse range of candidates into social care. The app also

streamlines the administration associated with the recruitment process.

**Care Friends** is working on a project to look at how the app can be applied in children’s social care in Wales around boosting foster carer recruitment.

You can find out more about Care Friends by watching our CII webinar, **Bolstering the Children’s Social Care Workforce** here:

[coram-i.org.uk/coram-innovation-incubator/coram-innovation-incubator-webinars](https://coram-i.org.uk/coram-innovation-incubator/coram-innovation-incubator-webinars)

[carefriends.co.uk](https://carefriends.co.uk)

<sup>1</sup> Institute of Public Care, Oxford Brookes University (April 2023), Evaluation of the Bristol Collaboration to design a service model for children, young people and families affected by extrafamilial harm and exploitation. <https://bristolsafeguarding.org/professional-resources/bristol-child-exploitation-collaboration>

### Career progression support – London Borough of Newham

The London Borough of Newham is investing in its social workers by providing a broad **career progression support programme**. The council offers excellent opportunities to develop skills, knowledge, and experience of working in a dynamic and progressive setting. The support includes membership of Making Research Count and CareKnowledge, which provides a wide range of evidence-informed practice and resources, access to a number of courses to apply for via the Apprenticeship route for all staff, and opportunities to work in a wide range of roles where one can develop knowledge and expertise alongside the provision of mandatory and non-mandatory training days and mentoring/shadowing arrangements. The council also offers Best Interest

Assessor and Approved Mental Health Professional training opportunities for Social Workers, peer supervision sessions, and reflective practice. Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWS) receive consistent support in their first year of employment through the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme, which aims to ensure that NQSWS become confident, competent social work professionals. All new social workers also have access to a five-day training course in systemic practice. Newham's overall work is underpinned by a Circles of Support practice framework, based on relational and anti-racist practice which focuses on providing a circle of support to both children and families, but also to social workers.

The project aims to provide social workers with a structured programme of induction into

professional social work, offering many benefits, including a personalised training and development plan, 1:1 support from trained and experienced ASYE assessors, reduced caseload, protected development time, training opportunities, internal moderation panel, clear appeals process, and career conversation at the end of the programme. The programme also provides opportunities to work alongside academics to deliver teaching sessions in their area of expertise, attend and participate in academic activities such as attending an accredited module relevant to social care, an admission day, participating in Skills Development Days and Practice Education Panels, and regular updates on various opportunities and recorded webinars.

### Children's Services Learning Academy – Torbay Council

Torbay Council's in house **Children's Services Learning Academy** is working with South Devon College to support its Community Care workers to complete the Level 4 apprenticeship in 'Working with Children, Young People and Families'. The Level 4 apprenticeship course will help learners to recognise and assess the complex needs of children, young people, and families and support qualified staff to deliver any specific interventions or referrals.

The course is part of the Council's 'grow your own' initiative, to boost the social work workforce via a number of routes. Once this 2-year

course is completed, participants will be able to apply for a social work degree. The course seeks to equip learners with an understanding of the importance of early intervention and safeguarding work and key knowledge to help them manage risk across the spectrum of needs for children, young people, and families. It builds on previous work Torbay council have pioneered as part of their 'grow your own initiative', which includes a 'Step Up' programme which enables graduates from professions such as teaching to fast track their social work qualification, as well as wider work the council have undertaken in collaboration with local universities.



**“When social workers have the tools and time to do their job well, it makes a huge difference to children’s and families’ lives.”**

**Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation, Department for Education, February 2023**

## Innovation at Frontline

At Frontline, we believe that innovation is absolutely crucial for social workers and the sector to deliver the best possible outcomes for children and families. And we also believe that social workers are uniquely placed to identify ways to overcome the challenges they face, but social workers rarely have the time, confidence or innovation-specific knowledge and expertise to translate their insights into practical, tangible solutions.

So at Frontline, with the help of our generous funders, we support social workers to turn ideas they have that could overcome these challenges and improve outcomes for children and families into a practical, scalable reality.

### Create Your Village

At the moment, an oppressive cycle exists whereby parents who have experience of being in care and their children are overrepresented in the safeguarding system. They also have very poor outcomes. This is traumatic for families, and very costly for local authorities. In a north London borough for example, over 12% of children on child protection plans have a care experienced parent; this results in an annual spend of approximately £286,000. Almost 15% of children in care in the same local authority have a care experienced parent; this results in an annual spend of approximately £3,500,000.

**Create Your Village** aims to empower local authorities to take on their corporate 'grandparent' role and break the cycle of intergenerational trauma, by enhancing care experienced parents "village" of informal support. **Create Your Village** will support local authorities to do this by helping them to co-produce a package of bespoke services with care experienced parents in their area, and integrate the support into the local authorities early help offer.

### Why Care

**Why Care** is a new approach to assessing, preparing and supporting those who want to be foster carers that draws together the experience of those with lived and learned knowledge foster care.

The purpose of this is to refocus the emphasis on what those with care experience, foster carers and social workers tell us is most important for foster carers to be

We have incubated a number of innovations through our philanthropically funded Innovation programme, including projects like Now Foster (a new approach to recruiting and training foster carers from diverse backgrounds), Thrive (an app designed to support social workers' emotional wellbeing and help them manage their caseloads) and Crescendo (a social work model designed to implement 'small changes' within local authorities to reduce bureaucracy and improve service to children and families).

We are currently supporting several new innovations, including **Why Care** and **Create Your Village**.



able to provide stable, loving homes. It will also look to gather more data throughout the process about those who withdraw from the assessment or within the first year and those who continue, so more targeted support and preparation can be offered to foster carers, and LAs can benefit from a deeper understanding of this.

**Why Care** is initially working with one local authority to pilot the **Why Care's** proposed new elements of the assessment process. **Why Care** wants to work with all interested parties to improve the current processes for assessment and support to increase the number and readiness of local authority foster carers.



## The Coram Innovation Inset

The Coram Innovation Incubator (CII) runs the Coram Innovation Inset, a five-session course offered to our members annually to support them to develop and implement an innovation pilot in their organisation. The Inset brings together a Design Thinking approach, social work theory and a focus on evaluation to help immerse participants in a problem, identify their end user, and think creatively about solutions. We then work together to support them to put this into practice and measure outcomes.

The Inset course is offered as part of membership of the Incubator, with three staff from member organisations eligible to join at no extra cost each year.

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Insight • Innovation

The Inset provides participants with a collaborative and supportive space to discuss challenges with like-minded people, confidence and tools to develop a pilot project, skills and expertise in evaluation, and two coaching sessions with an experienced, external coach, who is a tutor at the London Business School and Director of an independent innovation agency. CII member organisations benefit from staff time to explore practice challenges, upskilling colleagues, space for auditing and reflection, and a scalable project to address challenges.

In 2023, we ran our second cohort of the Inset and worked with local authorities across our member organisations – many had a focus on staff wellbeing and

retention, but also working at improving supervision for foster carers, expanding edge of care services, and developing a new apprenticeship programme for young people interested in working in children's social care. We also continued to work with participants from the first cohort to develop and scale their projects over the course of the year, and look forward to building on this success and running the Inset for the third time in 2024.

**You can find a case study from Aneesa and Margaret from the London Borough of Bromley on their experience of the Coram Innovation Inset here:**



Above: Aneesa and Margaret, Bromley Council

When Aneesa and Margaret, who work for Bromley Council, joined Coram-i's Inset programme, they were facing a common problem amongst local authorities. Social workers in children's services were leaving and becoming increasingly difficult to recruit.

Aneesa, Head of MASH, Referral & Assessment and EDT for Bromley, was unsure of how the Inset programme would help, but six months later they finished with a pilot scheme idea that has proved very successful.

Aneesa explains "We went in with an open mind but didn't realise how beneficial the Inset programme would be. We had a problem that needed to be solved. Social worker turnover was huge, constantly doing interviews was exhausting. We thought the problem lay with our recruitment practices. The sessions helped us to think about the issue in different ways.

"We really benefited from being in a room with other local authorities and the coaching we received helped us to think innovatively. We started looking at staff welfare and what we could do to make the lives of our social workers better. We know the job is very stressful and involves countless appointments and house visits, which are traditionally conducted between 9-5. This can be difficult for social workers and the people they are visiting who may have work and childcare commitments.

Margaret, Practice Manager, explains how they introduced flexibility to the service. "We put out a survey asking our social workers if they would benefit from working their hours flexibly. We learnt a lot about what would make their lives better and the

idea was well received. They were excited to have a better work-life balance and they felt better listened to and appreciated.

"We piloted the scheme with one team and it has been really successful so we're introducing it to another. Our social workers are more motivated and their wellbeing has really improved. Other teams are keen to get on board too! There is a real appetite for it."

The Bromley team are also working with CII partners at Microsoft to look at how simple technology solutions can also support their workforce in their work with children and families.

The Inset programme has given Aneesa and Margaret a clear solution to a problem but they have benefited in other ways too as Aneesa explains.

"Taking part in the programme gave us the time and space to step back and think outside the box. It has given us a new network of other local authorities who we can share best-practice with. We really enjoyed the one-to-one coaching too. We have even been introduced to some tech partners like Microsoft who are helping with other aspects of our work. I would really recommend the programme to other local authorities.

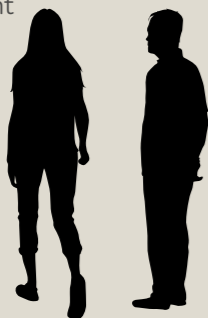
You learn so much about your organisation, yourselves, and the joy of innovation."

### Framework for London in Permanent Children's Social Work Recruitment- London Innovation and Improvement Alliance

Following on from the London Pledge to address recruitment challenges, a £20m social worker recruitment initiative has been launched in London in the context of increasing costs in children's social care. The **Framework for London in Permanent Children's Social Work Recruitment (FLiP)** is a partnership between Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation (YPO), London Councils and the London Innovation & Improvement Alliance (LIIA) and seeks to improve compliant access to permanent children's social workers for all London local authorities. The partnership will provide both "full" and "reduced" service offerings for London local authorities and define 16 specialist children's social care service providers both locally and regionally. The FLiP is a novel regional framework and guarantees uniformity in price structure, stable costs, a single point of contact for recruitment, and a standard of service through pre-agreed terms and conditions.

The initiative is expected to increase councils' access to permanent staff and help them save money on agency fees. The partnership will also help to address the shortage of social workers in London. The initiative was launched in August 2023 and is expected to have a positive impact on children's social care in London.

[liia.london/flip-childrens-social-work-recruitment](https://liia.london/flip-childrens-social-work-recruitment)



## "Working with the Coram Innovation Incubator is supporting us to tap into an existing network that offers diverse expertise. It supports cross-pollination of ideas which aids the development of effective solutions addressing complex needs".

Claire Wilson, Project Manager, North Yorkshire Council

### Every Child – The Contingent

**The Contingent** is a project developed in partnership with Microsoft that aims to create a more diverse and inclusive workforce by leveraging location-based matching. The project is taking place in the United States, and its goal is to help companies find the right candidates for their job openings while also promoting diversity and inclusion. The **Every Child** initiative is a case study within the Contingent project that focuses on recruiting and hiring for child welfare agencies. The initiative aims to help these agencies find and hire the best candidates for their open positions, with a focus on diversity and inclusion.

The **Every Child** initiative uses a location-based matching system to connect child welfare agencies with qualified candidates in their area. This system helps to ensure that candidates are familiar with the local community and can provide culturally sensitive care to the children they serve and in a range of ways. Part of the drive has been focused on supporting foster children. The initiative has already seen positive outcomes, with participating agencies reporting increased diversity in their workforce and improved outcomes for the children they serve. In 2022, the **Every Child** initiative engaged 2,341 community members to support their local child welfare system. By leveraging technology to promote diversity and inclusion, the **Every Child** initiative is helping to create a more equitable and just society for all.

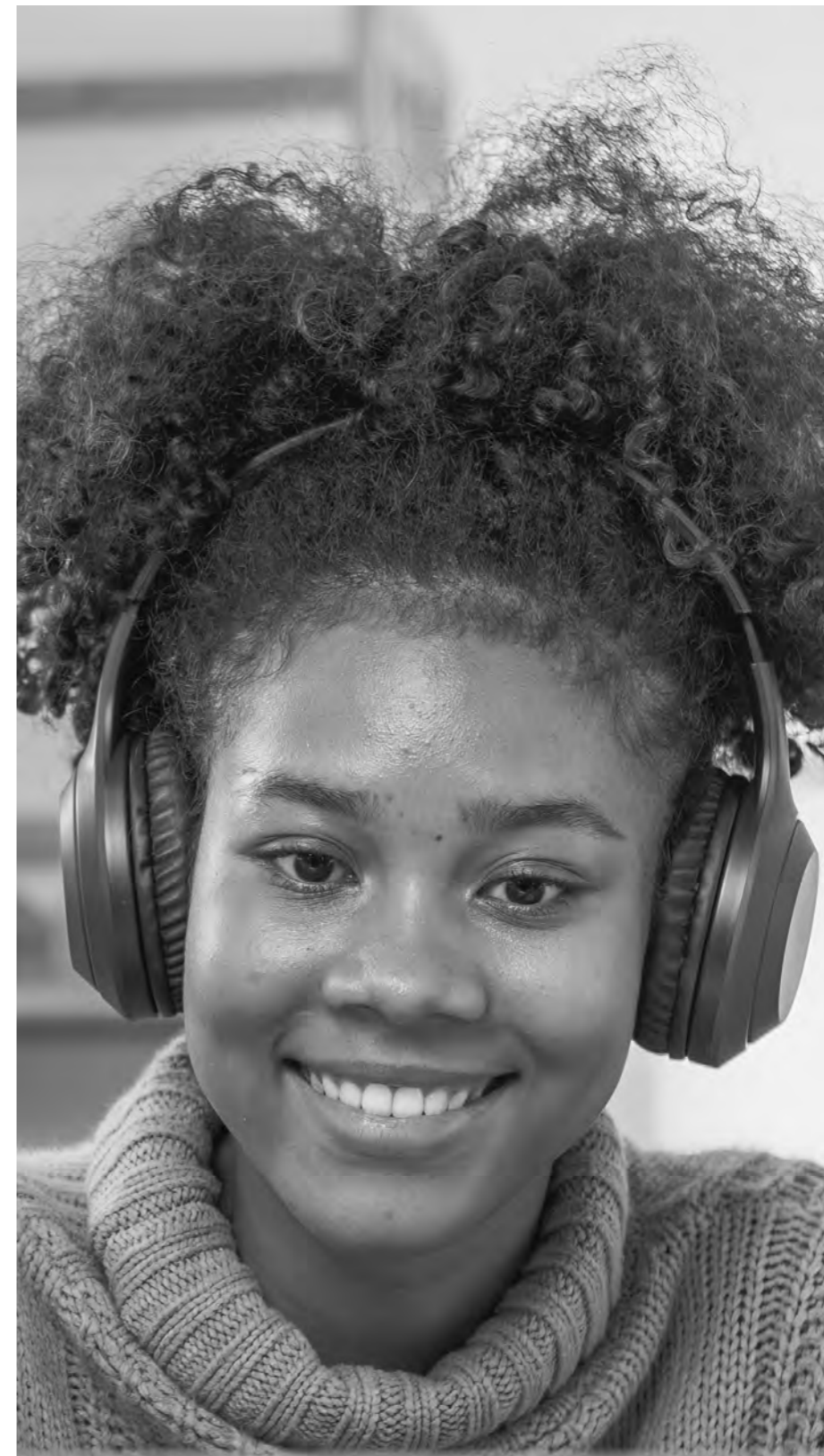
[thecontingent.org/initiatives/every-child](https://thecontingent.org/initiatives/every-child)

### Juno

**Juno** is an all-in-one employee benefits platform that provides flexible, inclusive, and socially conscious workplace benefits designed for remote teams. The platform is available worldwide and offers hundreds of experiences to choose from, ranging from mental health support and childcare services to fitness classes and food delivery boxes. **Juno Points** is the global wellbeing currency that allows employees to set a monthly Juno allowance per employee, giving them the freedom to choose how they spend it. The platform aims to democratise the process of choosing employee benefits by empowering workers to choose experiences and services they actually want, using credits allocated by their employer. **Juno's** mission is to end top-down decision-making around the benefits staff receive.

**Juno** is based in London and has received €3.7 million in funding to transform and personalise work perk schemes. Benefits include mental health support, childcare, fitness, and food delivery boxes. The platform has an average utilization rate of 91%. The platform is available for a monthly fee per employee and can be cancelled anytime.

[withjuno.com](https://withjuno.com)



## Coram Innovation Playbook

The Coram Innovation Incubator is excited to be launching the **Coram Innovation Playbook** in early 2024.

Acting as an accessible knowledge-sharing hub, the **Coram Innovation Playbook** seeks to showcase the range of new projects, initiatives and innovations from across the sector, and those in adjacent sectors.

The Playbook derives from The Child Welfare Playbook, which was designed in the US to support child welfare professionals. It was led by Marina Nitze, who previously served in the White House under President Obama and now develops approaches to approve foster care in the USA and was a collaborative effort between the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators.

We are delighted that the **Coram Innovation Playbook** will be promoting innovations featured in this CII Innovation Collective and as new projects emerge and are added to the Playbook, we hope this dynamic repository will enable children's services providers to remain at the forefront of innovation so they can deliver transformative change for children, young people and families.

We call on our colleagues across the sector to contribute to the **Coram Innovation Playbook!** Tell us what you are doing by emailing [innovation@coram.org.uk](mailto:innovation@coram.org.uk)

Visit <https://coram-playbook.netlify.app> to see our new Playbook in action!



**“Without change there is no innovation, creativity, or incentive for improvement. Those who initiate change will have a better opportunity to manage the change that is inevitable.”**

William Pollard

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Coram Campus  
41 Brunswick Square  
London  
WC1N 1AZ

Tel: 020 7520 0300  
Registered Charity no: 312278



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A call for contributions:  
tell us what you have seen

[innovation@coram.org.uk](mailto:innovation@coram.org.uk)