

**Corporate Parenting Committee
Derby Children's Rights Service
Annual Report
April 2020 – March 2021**

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1. Introduction to the Derby Children's Rights Service

The Change Grow Live Derby Children's Rights Service is a partnership between Change Grow Live and Derby City Council Children Services Department. The project has been funded by Derby City Council since April 2017, with contract renewal 1st Oct 2020. Based centrally in Derby to meet the demands of the service, it has a nationwide reach. During 2020/2021 the project continued to provide Independent Visitors, Independent Advocacy to looked after children and care leavers, Independent Advocacy at initial child protection conference and monthly Independent Advocacy support at Derby City residential homes.

a. Independent Visitors

Change Grow Live recruit and train volunteers from local communities to be independent visitors where children and young people are placed. Independent visitors may be matched with a child or young person up to 18 years or beyond if the young person has additional needs. In 2020/2021 this included recruiting and training volunteers in locations such as Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Yorkshire and Northumberland. Independent visitors may be matched with a child/young person where there is little or no contact with their birth family or it is thought to be in their best interest. It is voluntary participation and therefore the child/young person must consent to the referral being made – starting every relationship in this way means that the child/young person has full agency.

An independent visitor provides support on a monthly basis, with a telephone call or correspondence between visits. The aim is to provide a trusted adult, independent of the local authority with whom the child/young person may develop a lasting, stable and trusting relationship. During the visits the pair may share an interest, hobby or go on an outing together. During recruitment we encourage applicants to reflect; are they able to commit for a minimum duration of 2 years?

b. Independent Advocacy Issue Based Referrals

Change Grow Live provide Independent Advocacy for all looked after children and care leavers from Derby City referred to or contacting our service. Advocacy is a safeguard to ensure wishes and feelings are heard, that young people remain at the centre of all decision making and to protect their rights. Our service is lead by a qualified advocate, with skilled volunteers and complimented by a team of experienced sessional advocates from the Change Grow Live wider workforce. Change Grow Live model their advocacy services on the The National Standards for the Provision of Children's Advocacy Services 2002.

Change Grow Live strive to ensure the advocacy service is highly visible and accesible for all looked after children and care leavers by building on existing links and networks to raise public and professional awareness. Information about cases is shared with commissioning managers quarterly to ensure transparency and to enable monitoring of the quality of our service.

c. Independent Advocacy at Child Protection Conference

Where a family are involved in initial child protection proceedings and the children/young people are over the age of 4 years, a referral may be made to the Change Grow Live advocacy team. Our advocates meet with the child/young person if consent of the primary carer has been obtained. The advocate meets with the child/young person at their school in order to seek their wishes and feelings which are then shared with the Child Protection manager. During the pandemic, Initial Child Protection Conferences are being held virtually.

d. Independent Advocacy at Residential Homes in Derby

Change Grow Live advocates provide monthly clinics at the local authority residential homes in Derby. Advocates arrange with staff a convenient time to call and young people are encouraged to make contact with advocacy should the need arise. Occasionally young people self-refer if there is a matter arising, sometimes young people just wish to chat with advocate. By ensuring the same advocate attends it provides continuity and enables trusting relationships to build. Access has been restricted due to the pandemic, so meetings have been held virtually or outside; access being guided by DCC Covid-safe requirements and CGL risk assessments.

2. The Independent Visitor Service

a. Young People Figures

Referrals & Matching - Independent Visitor Service	Total
<i>Young people referred to the service</i>	13
<i>Young people newly matched</i>	12
<i>Year-end on-going relationships in Derby City</i>	8
<i>Year-end on-going relationships less than 20 miles away</i>	12
<i>Year-end on-going relationships out of area > 20 miles</i>	16
<i>Referrals withdrawn due to change in circumstances</i>	6
<i>Number of match end</i>	14
<i>Young people awaiting an IV at year end</i>	12

A match may end, or a referral withdrawn on account of a young person reaching 18 yrs., moving area, returning home to family, outgrowing the service or a change in personal circumstances for the volunteer.

b. Young People Demographics

Young Person Matched with an Independent Visitor	
Male	21
Female	15
SEN	12
White British	27
Mixed white British	2
Black British	3
Asian British	2
Other	2

Change Grow Live Independent Visitor Service helps to integrate children and young people into their local community, reducing isolation by being a part of something. Drawing volunteers from the local area helps build relationships, encourages compassion and in turn improves community cohesion.

Children and young people are at the centre of our project we are passionate about providing the support they need. Upon receipt of a referral, project staff conduct an initial assessment with the child/young person to obtain a clear understanding of their wishes and an insight into their expectations. Once a match is found the relationship is reviewed by our project staff twice a year as minimum to explore how the relationship is developing. We have several examples where volunteers have been matched for many years and some have continued to support their young person even when the young person has moved out of their local area.

c. Independent Visitor Activities

During 2020/21 young people and their independent visitors have taken part in a range of activities, together they plan how to make the best of their budget. This year it has been very challenging, but the young people have been amazing at accepting the changes.

Covid has meant that most activities have been virtual, or occasional socially distanced visits in the local area. The young people and their Independent Visitors enjoyed a variety of TEAMS meetings: Amazon deliveries – games, paints, crafts, and lots more. Movie nights, pizza's, pamper sessions have also been shared. Not forgetting, walks & bike rides outdoors. Pokémon Go has also made an appearance.

d. Service Feedback – Independent Visitor

Foster Carers

About their 14-year-old YP with additional learning needs commenting on the IV:

"IV is very reliable. Always does what she has told YP. During lockdown IV has been very supportive and kind. She Facetimes YP and sends her crafts through the post of which YP loves."

About their 10-year-old YP with autism and ADHD commenting on the IV:

"YP really looks forward to seeing his IV. She has a lot of patience and will listen to every word YP says, which we admit that sometimes we don't. She is also very calm with him, so he doesn't come back over excited."

Young People

When asked what's the best thing about having an IV, YP said:

"Have some time away from home and relax from the noise the boys make. You can do lots of activities out and stuff."

"They are not paid and volunteer to be there... they are not entitled to tell others what I'm saying... I feel safer or freer if you know what I mean; say if I was to talk to my SW about something, she'd write it down... talking to my IV she doesn't. I don't have to worry if she's going to think certain things about me. I know that if there is a problem about safeguarding, she'd have to tell."

"It's not for all kids... but sometimes if they are stuck indoors or bored, kids just need someone to take them out ... it's also a break from the past."

"She's understanding... fun... easy to talk to... and outgoing."

When asked if they have tried new things since having an IV, YP said:

"I'd never been rock climbing before"

"We went on a bike ride around Carsington Water"

"We went to Kent Life Pottery; I painted a dog"

3. The Independent Advocacy Service

a. Child Protection Conference

We provide independent advocacy support for children in need at initial child protection conference and thereafter at reviews if requested to do so.

2020-21 we supported 42 children/young people to participate in 46 separate conferences; quite often we liaise directly with parents to reassure and explain our role, helping to aid communication between family and services. The very nature of child protection demands that the process is slick and well managed, it is not uncommon for advocates to have just two days' notice to arrange to meet with a child. Normally our involvement ends at the initial conference, though some have required support at further reviews.

Young Person Demographics Child Protection Advocacy	Total
<i>White British</i>	28
<i>White European</i>	4
<i>Asian</i>	2
<i>Black</i>	6
<i>Other</i>	2

<i>5 - 10 years</i>	14
<i>11 - 15 years</i>	26
<i>16 - 17 years</i>	2
<i>Males</i>	20
<i>Females</i>	22

b. Issue Based Advocacy

Referrals Independent Advocacy Service	Total
<i>Young people referred to the service 2020-21</i>	85
<i>Young people in Derby</i>	52
<i>Young people out of area or at a distance</i>	33
<i>Visits to Derby City Residential Homes</i>	43
<i>Number of matters raised for young people</i>	81
<i>Number of matters closed for young people</i>	77
<i>On-going open cases at end of March 2020</i>	31

Young Person Demographics Independent Advocacy	Total
White British	31
White European	2
Mixed (White Caribbean)	3
Mixed (White African)	1
Mixed (White Asian)	3
Pakistani	1
Asian	1
Other	43

c. Matters Raised by Children and Young People

Issues raised - Independent Advocacy Service	Total
Support to prepare for a review	33
Support during a review	12
Support with leaving care workers & transition	2
Education	2
Home – living arrangements	16
Other	20

Matters defined as “**other**” are varied and include signposting to services such as health, independent visitors, solicitors, support obtaining a passport, support to change family name, matters of a financial nature, request to change social worker, support during transition into adult services, to raise a complaint, support to express wishes and feelings to their social worker to assist in care proceedings, contact with family or live story work.

d. Formal Complaints

Whenever possible, advocates seek resolution on behalf of the young person however, occasionally young person choose to raise a formal complaint. During 2020-21 two young people were supported to raise formal complaints:

1. Lack of Education Provision

Complaint 1 – A young person raised Stage 1 concerns relating to their education provision.

Complaint 2 – The same young person raised concerns they were not listened to at Stage 1, so raised a Stage 2 (Escalation from Stage 1). The issue was resolved at this stage.

2. Delays in processing relevant paperwork & passport application

Children's services arranged meetings with the young person and offered explanations regarding the delays; they continue to update him on their progress.

e. Service Feedback – Independent Advocacy

YP - "you got them to sort it out yeah, she better do what she said now". Foster carer said she thought it had been important for YP to have a voice of her own and that Advocate being involved had kept everyone on their toes. Feedback: the social worker thanked the advocate for supporting A and been consistent through the meetings with support and checking if A is well enough emotionally throughout the interviews.

"As the young person did not attend the meeting as planned, it was extremely helpful having your input. You managed to get a very helpful and detailed account of the young person's views which was powerful and meaningful. There isn't anything I can think of that you could have done better and I would recommend your service".

Social worker Locality 2

The staff have passion and enthusiasm for the service – it is all about the children. Training is good and you keep us up to date on things". **Volunteer Advocate.**

"The Advocacy service has allowed vulnerable young people to express their views and feelings when at times they have not been able to. I have worked with this service with a few of my customers and have always found it to be a positive experience. They have travelled out of the city to see customers and have always fed back with consent. There is usually a specific reason for advocacy, and it is really helpful to have an external unbiased person involved. The Advocate always worked in the favour of the customer and has been effective. There have been some difficult situations when the advocate has had to speak out against several professionals in the wishes of the customer". **Social Worker preparing for adulthood team.**

"The Advocate allowed the children's views to be shared impartially and echoed Social Care concerns. It captured the moment and how the children had shared the information. I would recommend this service. It provides children with an opportunity to share their wishes and feelings and they can be represented unbiasedly. It's a good service". **Social worker Locality 1/5**

"The manager has been an immense help to me from the beginning of my new role. Despite having a heavy workload, she is always willing to talk things through with me if I am stuck or suggest a different way of trying something. Because of this approach, I have felt able to share when I haven't done things as well as I would like and to discuss how I could do them differently next time. The result is that my confidence has grown immensely over the year and, although I still have loads to learn, I feel as if I am able to support young people appropriately now". **Sessional advocate.**

"I like everything about my advocate, she is just a proper nice person, always picks up the phone". **Young person age 13yrs.**

“She listened to me and helped get things done. When she said she was going to do something, she did it straight away”. **Young person age 14yrs.**

“You feel empowered, I’ve already recommended the service to two other people”.
Foster carer, non-instructed case

“She helped me when I needed it. I’d recommend having an advocate to other young people”. **Young person aged 18 yrs.**

“She listens to me and is very easy to talk to about things, I’d definitely recommend it”. **Young person aged 16yrs.**

“I felt listened to and helped and she was on the phone when I needed her. I’d recommend it (having an advocate) to other children and young people”. **Young person aged 16 yrs.**

4. Communication

a. Commissioners

The project has been providing a service in partnership with Derby City Council for 4 years; during that time we have built a strong positive relationship with professionals in a variety of different roles/teams.

Joint quarterly meetings are held with our partners from the local authority where monitoring information is scrutinised, and case studies shared. Partnership working is an opportunity to highlight strengths and identify solutions should improvement or development be required.

b. Networking

We network with Community Action in Derby who share opportunities regarding training, grants and networking events. We participate in the children and young people network meetings facilitated by Derby City Council. We present to first year social work students at Derby University raising awareness about Children’s Rights. Similarly. We attend volunteer recruitment events around the Midlands.

5. Children and Young People

Change Grow Live recognise that participation is key to our success in 2020-21, we:

- Attended the Children in Care Council sharing existing leaflets about our service and gathered ideas on how the service could be better advertised.
- Previous years invited children and young people (with their independent visitor), to participate in our training; sharing their own experience with potential volunteers is invaluable. However, due to pandemic, and moving the IV training courses online, this has not been practical or possible, though we are not considering re-instating this in whatever form might take.
- We keep in touch with young people both awaiting a match and those already matched twice a year to obtain their feedback about our service.

a. Best Practice

Referrals Independent Visitor Service: Change Grow Live accept referrals from social workers based on criteria fixed by our funders (young person subject to a care order, has limited or no contact with their birth family and it is considered to be in their best interest). To engage with the service, it is critical that the young person is in agreement with the referral being made. If we are approached by other stakeholders, we redirect to the social worker, they have overview and responsibility for the care plan. Once a referral is received, project staff consider suitability. Gatekeeping is essential as occasionally other services are more appropriate such as advocacy or CAMHS. Once accepted staff visit the child/young person to complete a person-centred initial assessment.

Practice: Change Grow Live are members of the National Independent Visitor Network (NIVN), meeting quarterly with other providers to share best practice, ideas, experience and forging positive links. We adhere to the National Standards for the provision of Independent Visitors. We are members of Article 39 raising awareness about the promotion of the protection of children living in institutional settings in England. We attend specialist training delivered by third party organisations to improve our skills and update our knowledge.

Referrals Independent Advocacy Service: Change Grow Live accept referrals from any source on behalf of looked after children, including self-referrals, foster carers, social workers, independent reviewing officers, social workers, health professionals, residential support workers or teachers. Change Grow Live adhere to the standards for advocacy offering a confidential and independent service to children and young people.

Recording Data: We follow GDPR regulations with regard to data protection i.e. we only collect data (information) if we need it, keep the data we hold up-to-date, only hold data as long as is necessary, make sure we share data safely and appropriately. We let staff, volunteers and service users know what we are doing to keep their data safe.

Confidential information, including referrals received via Egress, is securely stored on our data management system CRiis. We store all relevant information including basic details, contacts with professionals, risk assessments, contact sheets from volunteers and monitoring information. Only project staff and higher-level management have access. Regular alerts are in place to ensure checks and responses are completed in a timely manner ensuring continuous monitoring.

Independence: We are an independent service and strive to ensure the child/young person using our services understand that. Training, Initial assessments, match meetings and Independent Visitor sessions do not take place on Council premises. It is important that children and young people understand volunteers gift their time simply because they care. Advocates strictly adhere to the principles of advocacy, empowering the voice and rights of the child/young person they support.

Volunteers: Volunteers are trained under the Change Grow Live Safer Volunteer Recruitment (SVR) process a commitment to anti-discriminatory law, policy and practice. SVR is a seven-stage process including; application form, first interview, classroom training, enhanced DBS check, references, assessment pack and pre-commencement interview. Volunteers are not permitted to meet with a child/young person until all stages are complete.

Confidentiality: Independent visitors choose with their young person the activity they wish to engage in within budget, sometimes saving for more expensive trips. They share plans with project staff. Project staff complete necessary risk assessments and seek permissions before any activity is undertaken. The independent visitor returns a contact sheet and expense form to project staff – stored on CRiis. Information is not shared with third parties unless a safeguarding situation occurs. Similarly, advocates respect the privacy of the young person they support, agreeing with them an advocacy action plan, the young person remains in control of the relationship at all times and information is not shared with third parties without permission of the young person.

b. COVID-19

During the last year, Government guidance prompted adaptations to working methods to enable the Derby Children's Rights Service to continue operation during the lockdown period. All direct face to face work was suspended in order to minimise risk to staff, volunteers and young people. Communication via phone calls, text message, emails, and video calls have continued.

Prior to the pandemic, Change Grow Live would carry out face-to-face interviewing of volunteers, with successful applicants trained in groups of 10 or 12 in local premises provided by Derbyshire Fire Service, the University of Derby or local property owners. As of March 2020 that was all suspended and Change Grow Live had to quickly adapt their processes; initial interviews were carried out over the telephone; Trainers adapted their paper based training to provide online training, and after the implementation of Microsoft Teams capabilities the Independent Visitor volunteer training restarted in June 2020.

Community Action Additional Funding During Covid Pandemic

A basketball and hoop system was purchased for a 13-year-old in the care of Derby City Council; young person was at risk of isolation, and a potential to become distracted by local gangs:

YP lives with his foster carer in a small city centre house. The YP was referred to the IV Service; he had long resisted support from his professional network, spent little time outside of the house apart from school and playing on his PlayStation, and was reluctant to engage. On CGL's initial contact with the family, foster carer was worried their relationship was not good and the placement might end. YP was not convinced about having an Independent Visitor but agreed to meet the volunteer and they were matched.

The IV identified over several visits that the YP was reluctant to get involved in any forms of exercise but had mentioned a leaning towards basketball; he had some rare visits to a local park to play, though it is known the park is frequented by gangs of young people who are not good influences. During the lock-down, the IV discussed this further with the YP to see if there was any way he could play basketball at home, possibly using a wall mounted hoop and board. It transpired the foster carer was not allowed to attach a hoop (a relatively cheap option) to the house as it is rented. The IV turned to CGL and asked if it would be possible to obtain a free-standing board and hoop YP could use in the back garden. So, the hoop and a ball were ordered by CGL using funding obtained from Community Action.

After the delivery, the IV called the YP; they were on the phone for 20 minutes. YP was so excited to have received the hoop, he told the IV all about how he assembled it and mentioned his foster carer had also been playing basketball with him. A member of CGL staff was also in touch with YP and found his demeanour had changed; he was willing to talk more, instigated a FaceTime video chat and then made friendly jokes about the member of staff's appearance (hair and beard) after so many weeks in lock-down.