

'The Children's Rights Service'

As delivered by CSV on behalf of Derby City Council

Annual Report 2014/2015

About CSV:

CSV has over 50 years experience of working with volunteers, and currently supports up to 100,000 volunteers nationwide, every year, across a wide range of programmes. CSV's vision is of a society where everyone can participate to build strong and inclusive communities.

Our Values:

Inclusion – We believe everyone has the right to be an active citizen and to contribute to their community.

Quality – We want people to lead meaningful and fulfilled lives by providing quality opportunities for everyone to be actively involved in their communities, and by developing their skills.

Learning – We aim to be a learning organisation and expect our staff to be positive, engage with volunteers and learners, be supportive, share knowledge and skills, and learn from others and their experience.

Flexibility – We aim to inspire and innovate, to adapt to change and respond to feedback.

Valuing people – We value and respect all the people with whom we engage – our volunteers and beneficiaries, our staff and our partners.

About CSV Derby:

CSV in Derby consists of a team of 3 staff members bringing together a wealth of knowledge and experience. The team consists of a Project Manager, Project Co-ordinator and Project Support Worker. Staff members have vast experience and/or qualifications in a range of health and social care areas. Together, the team have also amassed over 15 years of voluntary experience. Since June 2014, CSV have been extremely lucky to have an experienced and qualified solicitor working as an independent advocate within the team to provide a more robust service for young people and our partners. This new recruitment has also had an impact on the quality of service that we have been able to provide and has had a direct impact on the number of referrals seen in all advocacy work streams.

CSV has been working alongside Derby City Council since 2001 initially through providing the Independent Visitor Service and from 2004 for the Independent Advocacy Service. Thereafter from 2009 providing the Independent Advocacy at Child Protection Conference and from 2011 for The Children in Care Council. The current contract is due to expire in 2017.

The Project Manager maintain close links with the Head of Service for Quality Assurance and meet quarterly in order to provide detailed statistics and information pertaining to each service. The Project Manager also meets with the Director of Specialist Services on a quarterly basis to ensure that a good level of communication is maintained and to discuss any problem areas. In February 2014, Derby City Council employed Pervez Akhtar in the position of Corporate Parenting Lead. Pervez will directly manage The Children's Rights Service helping with service development, communication and helping to identify solutions to problems. Pervez will also be the named link person between our service, the Children in Care Council and The Corporate Parenting Board. The Corporate Parenting Lead role will have a wider remit to ensure that the authority and its partners are meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for all children looked after in Derby City. CSV are excited to be working with Pervez moving forward.

The Project Manager or Project Co-ordinator also attend regular team meetings with the Independent Reviewing Officers. For quality assurance this regular contact ensures that any potential problems/issues are alleviated as soon as possible. Information is shared and discussed resulting in a better and much more valuable service.

Either the Project Manager or the Project Co-ordinator also have a presence on the Children in Care Commissioning Board and The Corporate Parenting Board. On the latter, a Children in Care Council member would normally be in attendance. We also have regular contact with the Children and Young People Network (C.I.C) enabling close working relationships with other third party organisations.

About 'The Children's Rights Service'

The Children's Rights Service is made up of 4 projects; The Independent Visitor Service, The Independent Advocacy Service, Independent Advocacy at Child Protection Conference and The Children in Care Council. The majority of these projects are facilitated by the use of volunteers. We carefully recruit, vet and train all of our volunteers resulting in a large pool offering a range of ages, ethnicities and locations. Over the course of this period, The Children's Rights Service worked with over 60 volunteers, some of whom have been volunteering with us since 2008. We are proud of this achievement as nationally volunteer retention can be problematic. CSV offer on-going training and support to all volunteers and meet all of their expenses.

The Independent Visitor Service

Why do some children and young people need an Independent Visitor?

Sadly, some children and young people who are looked-after by their local authority lose all contact with adult family members; they may feel that they have no one to turn to for advice and support, or simply to have fun with. The 1989 Children Act entitles these children and young people to an Independent Visitor.

What Independent Visitors do:

Independent Visitors are matched on a one to one basis with a child or young person, taking into account such things as gender, ethnic background, location, interests and, of course, personality. They aim to build a rewarding friendship based on trust, mutual respect and shared interests. Independent Visitors support the young people they are matched with, helping them when they are facing difficulties in their lives, or new challenges. Independent Visitors meet their young person on a fortnightly basis and enjoy time together either by doing leisure activities or by working towards achieving goals as identified by the young person and social worker.

The Matching Process - Priorities

Referrals are considered on a case by case basis, sadly a waiting list is almost inevitable however, awaiting referrals are regularly reviewed. Referrals are prioritised as follows (non exhaustive list) :

- Out of area children are first priority, recognising that the child may already be experiencing feelings of isolation, every effort is made to secure a match as quickly as possible.
- Current lifestyle of the child, for example some children may have a number of extra curricular interests whereas others have little or none at all.
- Concerns raised by the social worker – sometimes social workers will highlight cases requiring particular urgency, for example if the child has suffered a recent trauma
- Individual issues, for example a child lacking in confidence
- Amount of contact with family members – for example, some children may have regular contact whereas others will have little or no contact thus, this child would be given priority.

Statistics

In the year 2014/2015, The Children's Rights Service received 33 referrals for Independent Visitors, which is an **increase of 17.86%** from 2013/2014. We believe this as a result of continually promoting the independent visitor project ensuring it is accessible and continued confidence in our service. If a volunteer has been trained and is available, the response time between referral and matching can be as little as one month, but in most cases is between 3 – 5 months. A delay can be caused if the requirements for a volunteer are too specific i.e. gender or ethnicity. At all times, The Children's Rights Service will work closely with social care staff in order to provide an effective 'match'.

At any one point in time, The Children's Rights Service aim to achieve 40 live matches. As at the 31st March 2015, 41 matches were active, with 43 matches being active in October and November 2014 evidencing high target achievement. Achieving this target can sometimes be challenging particularly given the increased percentage of out of area referrals. For these young people, The Children's Rights Service has to identify and train a volunteer using volunteer bureaux and other CSV offices in locations around the country. This can increase the waiting time significantly. Over the past year, matches have been made in Stoke, Newark and Melton Mowbray using this method. As at the 31st March 2015, 18 out of the 41 matches evidenced featured a young person residing out of area (not in Derby or Derbyshire). Also at this time, the waiting list featured 11 young people and of these, 5 young people resided at over 20 miles away. The importance of matching these young people will remain a priority in to 2015/2016.

We ask that all of our volunteers commit to us for at least one year in order to offer consistency and reliability. In October 2014 our longest match came to an end due to the young person reaching 18 years of age. The match had been going for nearly 8 years. This showed great dedication. We also have 2 matches that had been going for 5 years, 6 over 2 years the majority between 6 - 18 months. On many occasions our volunteers have been matched again and again evidence that The Children's Rights Service retains volunteers.

Appendix 1 gives an example of the benefit of this service to both the young person and volunteer.

Evaluation of impact

Matches do end and when they do we contact all persons to properly evaluate our performance and ascertain the value added to the service user following use of our service. Over the last year, The Children's Rights Service has worked with CSV Head Office to improve our evaluation methods. Our evaluation form aims to capture important data such as outcomes, but also feedback about the benefits of having a service. We are now offering the evaluation form in the format of a survey monkey, which can be completed either on-line or via a mobile app. Alternatively, we send a paper copy. Evaluation is essential to monitor all of our projects. We always act upon feedback received as we strive to constantly improve our service delivery.

Over the course of the year 24.5% of all evaluation requested was either completed on-line or by paper. This is a slight decrease of 9% from 2013/2014, but still an increase of 5.5% from 2011/2012.

An annual summary is always collated, with the following main findings/recommendations coming from this year's evaluation:

- ***When we are together, I can just be myself (Y.P.)***
- ***Having an independent visitor has really helped my young person have the confidence to try new things (S.W.)***
- ***You can go out to places you've never been to before or would like to go (Y.P.)***
- ***I can join in new activities and learn new things (Y.P.)***

- ***Staff are friendly and helpful and always try to find a good match (S.W.)***
- ***It can be a bit lonely being an independent visitor, so I always try to attend the volunteer support group meetings to meet other volunteers plus to share both the good and bad things about volunteering (I.V.)***

Y.P. – young person, S.W. – social worker, I.V. – independent visitor.

The Independent Advocacy Service

Why do some children and young people need an Independent Advocate?

A young person may request an Independent Advocate when they need support and guidance, when making a complaint or need advice about other issues they may feel unhappy about. From April 2004 looked after children and children in need (for child protection conference only) have the right to independent advocacy when they are making a complaint or to ensure that their voice is heard when any decisions are being made about any part of their life. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 gives them this right.

What Independent Advocates do:

An Independent Advocate can promote and uphold the rights of these children and ensure that they are listened to and treated with respect. An Independent Advocate will put the child at the centre of everything they do, supporting them to be involved in decisions about their future. An Independent Advocate always works within the young person's wishes and feelings as opposed to their best interests. This can sometimes prove to be difficult as the Independent Advocate may have to challenge decisions made by the local authority.

The Independent Advocacy Service is split in to 3 advocacy streams.

Case Advocates

A Case Advocate will have time limited involvement with a young person referred to the project, or who contacts the project themselves. The advocate will work with the young person in accordance with their wishes and feelings towards their desired outcome.

For the period 2014/2015, The Children's Rights Service received 51 referrals in total for case advocacy which is an enormous **increase of 121.74%** from 2013/2014. 12 referrals were from young people placed outside of the city boundary in areas such as Kent, Telford and Sheffield, evidence that young people still found our services accessible. In all cases, from the point of referral to the point of initial contact with a young person, The Children's Rights Service made contact within 48 hours and in most cases had an initial meeting within 72 hours. All cases are time limited and the advocate is led solely by the wishes of the young person.

The Independent Advocate wherever possible will ascertain the desired outcome and discuss available options and areas of compromise. If appropriate, the Independent Advocate will discuss consequences of a particular course of action. The

Independent Advocate will promote self advocacy at all times where appropriate and aim to keep the young person involved in proceedings as much as possible and feedback relevant information.

Examples of cases over the past year have included problems with placement moves, lack of education provision and contact with family, with the latter complaint being the biggest overall cause featuring in over half of the 51 cases. In most cases, a satisfactory conclusion/outcome was achieved by talking to all professionals involved and by actively promoting the young person's voice. Out of the 51 referrals, only one case progressed on to become a stage one complaint, this related to the standard of care received by a young person. All complaints are passed to the complaints department within Derby City Council and the Independent Advocate will monitor the process to ensure that the complaint is dealt with as per the complaints procedure and escalation process as set out by the complaints department at Derby City Council.

Appendix 2 highlights advocacy in action.

Placement Advocates

Independent Advocates meet groups of children and young people in residential homes or other places where young people get together. Independent Advocates will either deal with issues as they arise in group situations or involve another Independent Advocate as necessary. These meetings take place on a quarterly basis. Since reducing the service in 2012 from a monthly basis, The Children's Rights Service had seen a significant reduction in the amount of referrals from such meetings. Feedback from staff and residents indicated that 3 monthly visits is a too lengthy gap when in some cases the turn over of residents can be quite high. In order to build trusting and meaningful meetings a regular presence is required. In 2014, The Children's Rights Service definitely saw an increase in the number of referrals as a result of the new advocate temporarily re-instating the house meetings in order to provide a full and detailed introduction of her skills, knowledge and experience. For 2015/2016, alternative methods for providing regular advocacy meetings will be investigated.

Advocacy at Child Protection Conferences

Independent Advocates have a time limited involvement with the child or young person and will ensure that the child or young person participates in the conference in a way they decide. The advocate will:

- Contact the social worker within two working days of the notification being received to ensure the parents have given consent for advocacy support and for contact details.
- Arrange to meet with the child/young person
- Ensure the young person understands the advocacy role is i.e. assisting the young person in expressing their wishes and feelings, not questioning them about the facts.
- Give the young person all the information needed so they can decide how they wish to participate.

- Attend the conference either with or on behalf of the young person.

As at 31st March 2015, The Children's Rights Service had supported 84 young people to participate in their conference. This stream of advocacy shows the biggest area of growth.

Demand is growing and can bring additional challenges e.g. where children have English as a second language or due to the number of siblings within one family. The participation of the 84 young people was facilitated by either supporting the young person to attend or by recording and presenting their wishes and feelings. In most cases, the information provided by the young person has proved invaluable. On one occasion it proved to be the turning point for the family and ultimately resulted in the family being taken off the child protection plan.

For 2015/2016, we may need to consider alternative ways of working as the value of the participation is so highly regarded that ideally an advocate would work with all eligible young people. In 2014/2015 this would have been 264. Eligible young people are 6 years +. A notable impact on whether children have access to advocacy for child protection conference is the lack of response from social care staff. In 2015/2016, we will continue to monitor this.

Evaluation of impact

Evaluation of all advocacy work is undertaken on a case by case basis. Advocates establish with the young person whom they are working with how they are feeling on a sliding scale from one to ten with ten being the happiest before any work is undertaken. The Independent Advocate will identify with their young person what actions/outcomes would be required in order to increase their number. The Independent Advocate will also discuss acceptable options and outcomes identifying potential consequences for any course of action taken. After the final meeting/an acceptable outcome has been achieved, the Independent Advocate will re-visit the young person and establish whether the intervention of an advocate has been beneficial.

In most cases, the evaluation is completed whilst in the presence of the young person, however if this is not appropriate, an evaluation form will be sent.

An annual summary is always collated, with the following main findings;

- ***Advocacy was the turning point for the family (S.W.)***
- ***I could tell my advocate things I couldn't tell my social worker (Y.P)***
- ***I want someone that will really understand me and listen to me (Y.P.)***
- ***I wanted my advocate at my meeting for moral support and she was the only person that I thought was in my corner (Y.P)***

Y.P. – young person, S.W. – social worker.

Children in Care Council

The Purpose of a Children in Care Council

It is important that children and young people have an opportunity to shape and influence the parenting that they receive at every level – from expressing their wishes and feelings about the individual care they receive in their placements, through to helping shape the overall strategy for children in their area through Children in Care Council. Children in Care Councils have the potential to contribute to transforming the lives of those involved.

Who we are

The Derby City Children in Care Council represents the views of Derby City looked after children, young people and care leavers. The group meet on a monthly basis throughout the year and are involved in decision making and service development along with informing the Corporate Parenting Board. A representative from the Children in Care Council regularly attends the Corporate Parenting Board meetings. The group works alongside Derby City Council to try and improve the lives of the children and young people within their care.

Over the course of 2014/2015, a core group of 8 dedicated young people attended most months. This was supplemented by at least 2 young people attending each meeting. The majority of young people were in foster care, with a minority being either care leavers or from a residential home. Throughout the year and as a result of the continuing improvement of links with the residential homes, a small increase in the amount of young people attending from such homes has been seen. For 2015/2016, we are continuing to ask that any issues from residential home meetings can then be passed on to the Children in Care Council if the young people so wish. Meetings are lively and productive. Issues and things discussed are raised by the young people and have included contact with social worker, the Pledge, the redevelopment of the children's homes, how we can reach out to new members, education, career opportunities, leaving care, training needs for the group, team building and working with professionals from Derby City Council to help shape new and existing services.

We encourage young people who are not able to enjoy a physical presence at meetings to participate in any way that they feel comfortable. We are able to offer the use of Skype, email or conference call. We also facilitate opportunities for the young people being used for consultation purposes when the need arises. This can take the form of a paper questionnaire or survey monkey. For 2015/2016, The Children's Rights Service will continue to investigate safe mediums of communication/promotion so that as many young people as possible are able to take part/be aware of the work and the value of the Derby City Children in Care Council.

Over the course of 2014/2015, the Children in Care Council invited guest speakers to attend their monthly meetings. Guests are invited to attend if they add value to the

meeting and if the young people are in agreement. It is pleasing to note that a Director of Specialist Services attended the meeting at least once a quarter. Other guests have included the Chair and Vice-chair of the Corporate Parenting Board plus representatives from the Fire service and The Police Crime and Commissioners office.

The Children's Rights Service produces a newsletter on a quarterly basis that is sent out to all Derby City looked after children and young people aged 8 to 18 years. This newsletter is produced jointly with members of the Children in Care Council and is filled with news and views from the members along with changes in legislation and any other newsworthy items.

The members of the Children in Care Council are also offered the opportunity to take part in events and activities that are both beneficial to them as individuals and as council members. In August 2014, two young people attended a 'Passport to Parliament' event organised by The Who Cares Trust charity. The aims of these sessions are to provide young people with the skills and encouragement needed to lobby their MPs for change. Representatives at these meetings can then be invited to attend the 'All Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers' held at Portcullis House in Westminster. In December 2014, a young person was invited to attend said meeting and enjoyed a day out in London. The young person felt as if he had really been part of something and has requested that he be invited to future meetings. In this first instance, he was very lucky and all transport costs were met by The Who Cares Trust.

A major piece of work undertaken in April 2014 was the production of a short information DVD entitled 'Living in a Children's Home'. The young council members wrote the script, decided on the shots and were involved in editing the film. More information can be found in appendix 3.

Appendix 3 highlights the benefit of encouraging active participation within the CiCC

Other notable activities/participation opportunities

- 2 young people attended an interview skills training day with Derby City Council
- 3 young people attended 'A National Children's Bureau' Corporate Parenting Day in Nottingham
- 8 young people attended a summer activity and team building day at Rosliston Forestry Centre
- 2 young people sat on the interview panel for Corporate Parenting Lead vacancy
- All young people were offered a responsible pet ownership course run in conjunction with Pets at Home

- 8 young people attended a Children in Care Council meeting held at Chaddesden Fire Station

At the beginning of 2012, the Children in Care Council along with The Children's Rights Service successfully launched the 'Children in Care Pledge'. The pledge is a promise made by Derby City Council to all Derby children and young people in care. The Pledge is part of Derby's commitment to give children and young people in care the best opportunities they can have in life. All adults who work for and with the Council will make a commitment to work to this Pledge at all times. Promotional material is regularly sent out to all looked after children, young people and social care staff. Posters are displayed in all social care offices and can regularly be seen on the electronic notice boards throughout the Council House. In October 2014, three members of the Children in Care Council spent time auditing the Pledge.

Appendix 4 provides full details of the audit

Future Plans for the Children in Care Council

- Through regular house visits to all of the residential homes, improve the links with the young people and staff to ensure that a representative from each home is visible on the Children in Care Council
- Increase the number of members and virtual members
- Ensure that consultation is always followed up with feedback
- Ensure a close working relationship with the Corporate Parenting Committee
- Establish a clear work programme for the year ahead. Book guests that add value to the meeting
- Attend children's homes inspections with Councillors
- Meet with other Children in Care Councils to discuss good practice/areas for improvements
- Sit on interview panels for senior posts within Derby City Council
- Ensure that the pledge is fully embedded within the work of the Council

Discoveries/Key Issues for the Children in Care Council

- Out of area young people should have the same opportunity to participate
- Although we participate in consultation events, we very rarely receive feedback regarding whether our input has made a difference.

Impact of the Children in Care Council

- Made a film for Children and young people to raise awareness of living in a home
- Been involved on interview panels for key staff within Derby City Council
- Completed a mystery shopper to ensure the Pledge is being adhered to
- Helped shape services within Derby City Council

Summary

2014/2015 was another successful year for The Children's Rights Service. Despite the challenges faced regarding finding suitable Independent Visitors for out of area young people within an acceptable time frame and the increasing demand for Independent Advocacy at Child Protection Conference, The Children's Rights Service has managed to deliver a very good level of service.

The staff members within The Children's Rights Service are dedicated to providing a service that is of a very good quality and meets the needs of its service users. They are also committed to working with Derby City Council to improve any areas that are identified through the quarterly monitoring process and through any feedback/evaluation received.

The Children's Rights Service looks forward to 2015/2016 and meeting new challenges that may arise.

Statistics

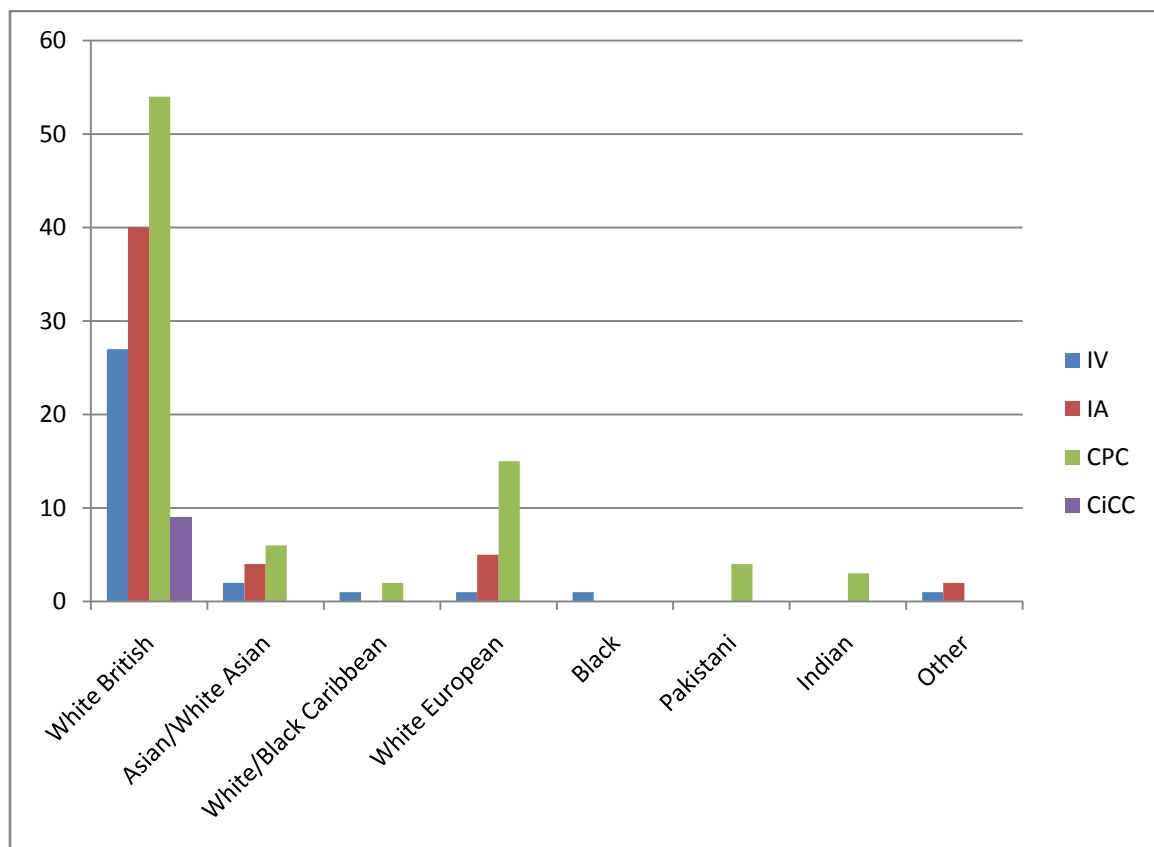
For all projects, and for every young person that accesses one of our services, we collect data including their gender, age and ethnicity. Over the year 2014/2015, the following referrals were received for each of our projects:

The Independent Visitor Service:	33
The Independent Advocacy Service:	51
Advocacy at Child Protection Conference:	84
Children in Care Council: (New members only)	09

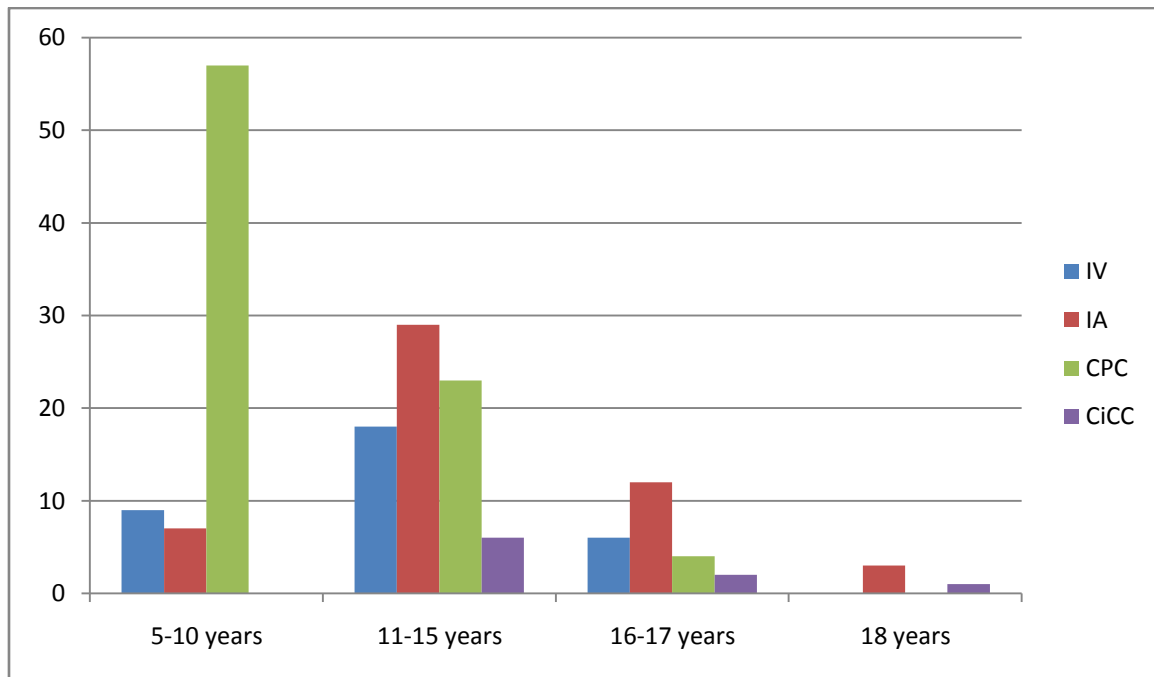
The following charts reflect the data we have been able to collect, broken down in to each service area, in order to provide a comparison for the year.

In comparison with 2013/2014, the biggest areas of change are the number of Eastern Europeans accessing all services showing a mammoth increase of 250% and the number of under 10's accessing all services has risen by 52%.

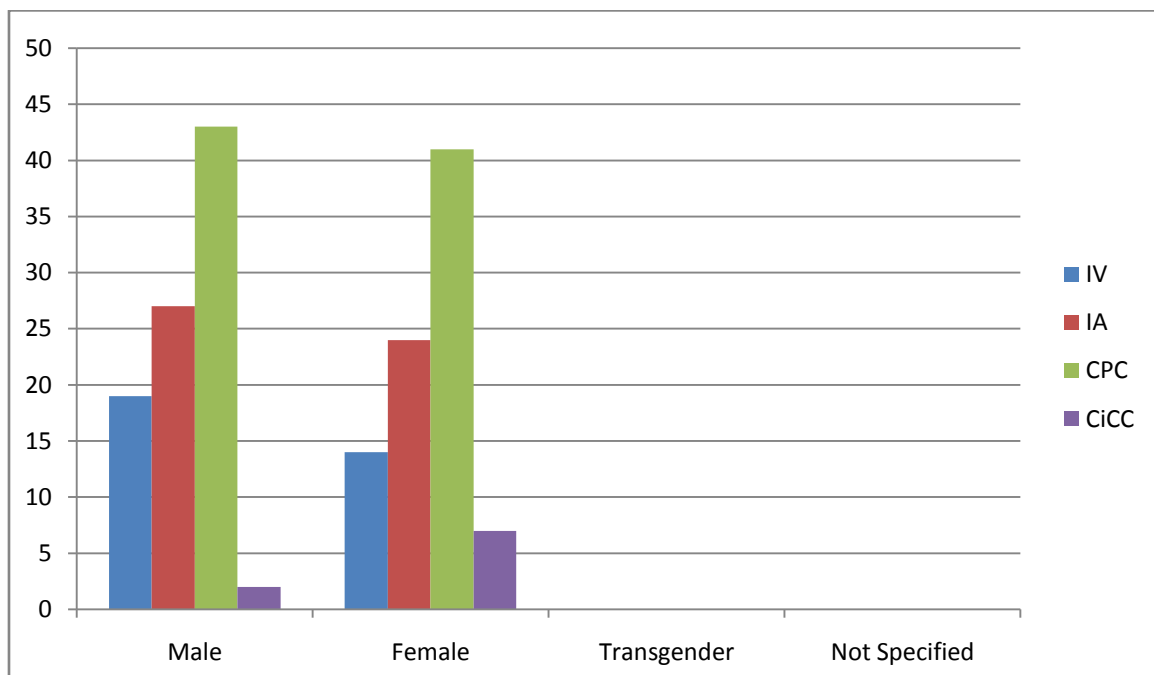
Ethnicity



Age



Gender



Report provided by Diane Cook Regional Manager.

Please note that as from 27th April 2015, CSV will be known as Volunteering Matters.