



The Children's Rights Service Annual Report

Achievements 2015 -16

- Child Protection Conference : Derby City Council Target exceeded by 340%
 - Independent Visitor Service : Target met
- Independent Advocacy expanded to all Children's Homes on a monthly basis
- Non instructed Advocacy embedded in the service providing a voice to the most vulnerable LAC
 - Children In Care Council re-write and present the Pledge
- 181 children and young people are assisted by the children's rights service

Who are Volunteering Matters?

Volunteering Matters, formerly known as CSV, is a national charity leading UK volunteering in policy and practice. Our vision is of a society where everyone can participate in their local community through volunteering and social action. Our mission is to invest in people through volunteering and social action; to reduce inequalities and isolation, improve health and wellbeing and so build a stronger more inclusive society.

Volunteering Matters in Derby is funded by Derby City Council to facilitate and deliver The Children's Rights Service for looked after children and care leavers of Derby. A small staff team, led by the Regional manager recruit, train, deploy and supervise volunteers in the delivery of four separate services:

- The Independent Visitor Service
- The Independent Advocacy Service
- Advocacy at Child Protection Conferences
- The Children in Care Council

Close working relations and regular consultation with our funders – Derby City Council

Throughout the year, the regional manager and project coordinator meet with the Corporate Parenting lead, commissioning manager and Participation Lead to ensure close monitoring of the service, regular review ensures a two way communication where matters can be discussed, issues highlighted and swiftly resolved; an example of this is raising the profile of the Pledge within Derby City Council. Further more, the regional manager attends the Corporate Parenting Committee and the C + YP Commissioning meetings and the CYP participation network.

Our Volunteer Team

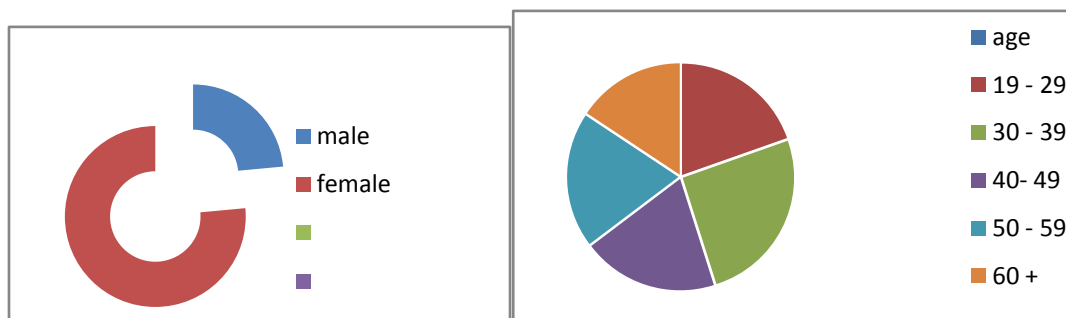
Participation of Children and Young People in service development

VOLUNTEERING MATTERS

To ensure we continue to offer a high quality and robust children's rights service, we nurture our volunteers bringing them into the folds of our team. It is essential that the young people we support feed into our future. We therefore ensure that they are involved in training volunteers and recruitment of staff members. We seek and use their views throughout their time with us.

Volunteers are vetted and assessed during a three day bespoke training programme. In addition, those wishing to become advocates are required to submit two case studies and undertake shadowing. Until we are completely satisfied of their commitment and suitability a volunteer does not undertake a role with us. Once operational, volunteers are required to submit diary sheets and telephone if they have any concerns after contact with a young person enabling staff to closely monitor activities.

We currently have 73 volunteers across the projects, 9 of which are dual role (independent visitors and advocates). To ensure we meet the needs of children and young people referred to our service, volunteer applicants are encouraged from all age and ethnic backgrounds; the majority of our volunteers are white British, we also have Black, Caribbean, French, Latvian, Pakistani and dual heritage. The age range is 19 – 71, the majority are women – a matter under constant review as we endeavour to increase the numbers of male volunteers



We recognise the commitment gifted by our volunteers and work hard to ensure they feel valued and share pride in the service delivered. To achieve this we:

- Provide ongoing mentoring and supervision on a case by case basis.
- Share regular newsletters about Volunteering Matters nationally and changes within our local service.
- Provide an annual social event
- Hold quarterly peer meetings and focus groups to ensure peer support is available and utilised.
- Encourage personal development by sign posting to relevant training and where we identify a wider need facilitate training ourselves.

The Four Projects

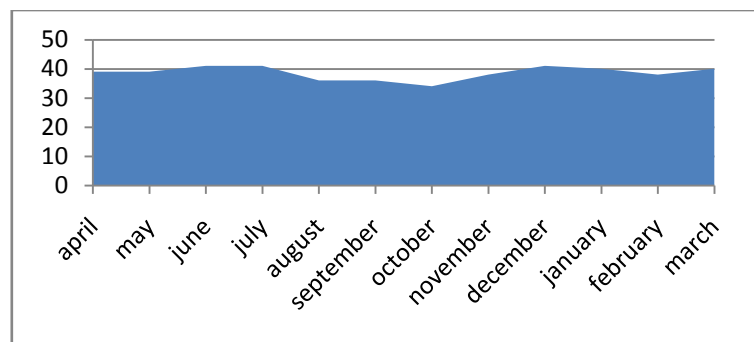
1. The Independent Visitor Service

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Since 2001, Volunteering Matters are proud to have coordinated the Independent Visitor service on behalf of Derby City Council. Where it is thought to be in their best interest, children and young people are asked if they would like an Independent Visitor. Independent visitors are carefully matched taking into account shared interests, location, personality and any matters raised by social care practitioners for example, the social worker may highlight that a child or young person would benefit from a positive male role model. The service agreement with Derby City Council is for 40 + matches at any one time. 2015 -16 VM received 21 new referrals – this is less than the previous year (33 referrals) which had seen an increase of 17% on 2012-13. (NB: please see service development)

Our lowest number of matches was 34 in October –due to a number of matches ending as young people turned 18 or returned to family. Our highest number was 41 in June, July and December. We ended the year with 40 matches, 25 of which were outside the City boundary and 12 young people on our waiting list.

Independent Visitor Matches 2015 - 16



Referrals

Referrals may be made for an Independent Visitor at any point once a child/young person is looked after by the local authority and it is considered in their best interest to do so. The child must be in agreement with the referral being made. Once a referral is received we adhere to the priority criteria set by Derby City Council:

- A child/young person placed outside of the City boundary
- Lifestyle of the child/young person i.e. whether they are already engaged in extra curricular activities or are experiencing social isolation
- Concerns raised by the social worker (e.g. recent trauma)
- Personality traits (e.g. Child/young person has low self esteem, lacking confidence)
- Contact with birth family

During training we emphasize the importance of longevity of matches, ensuring that the child/young person has continuity and stability in what can sometimes be an uncertain lifestyle. Our longest match to date is 8 years. Friendships develop and in several cases volunteers and young people have continued to meet independently and offer support, once the young person reaches 18 years and are no longer eligible for the independent visitor service.

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Over the last 12 months, children and young people have had no less than 227 contacts with their independent visitors. Activities undertaken are varied, creative, entertaining and educational. As part of ongoing monitoring and evaluation, Independent and their matches are asked to provide detailed records of how children and young people have benefited from their time together after each visit. We are evaluated by our customers – the children and young people accessing the service and these are some of their comments:

"I developed a brain"

"I go out the house more"

"I now understand English better, so I can talk to people better. I now ask if I hear a word I don't understand."

"Met a new friend and I go out more:

"I've tried new things, been to a few new places"

"More activities people listen to me"

"Able to communicate with people easier:

"I have more freedom and I go out more"

"I feel more confident"

Activities undertaken by Independent Visitors and Young people 2015 -16

shopping in Burton on Trent	Chesterfield
lunch	Roller world
birthday present	Matlock bath walking by the river
aero park	adventure golf
castle Donnington	ghost walk
cinema	alter rock climbing
Birmingham: history and art museum	Christmas fair
Nottingham: city caves, galleries of justice	watch a football match
Tutbury castle fireworks + Viking burning	Drayton manor
coffee	tobogganing
cicc presentation at council house	pottery painting
local carnival	heights of Abraham
Markeaton park	riding lessons
boat trip	space centre
Calke Abbey	
Geocaching	Rosliston forestry centre

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Elvaston woodland
festival
Pickford's house
ice skating

trip to post office to see how posting
packages works
Tamworth castle
comic con NEC - Birmingham

An account from an Independent Visitor:

"As an Independent Visitor I was matched with a young man of 15 who was struggling at school, was placed in a foster home away from the City and was finding it difficult to mix socially. When I first started taking him out on our twice monthly visits, he would try and hide behind me when I went to talk to someone, he wouldn't go to a shop counter to buy anything, and would crack his knuckles if he started to get stressed in unfamiliar situations.

Over the last year I have had the pleasure of getting to know this young man. He is bright, quick witted and very intelligent. He's a very good artist and loves animated films, he now has the confidence to go to the tills when buying something from the shops and when I talk to strangers he'll be fine just standing next to me, though joining in the conversations is our next goal! Not so long ago, he also plucked up the courage to tell me he wasn't happy with the number of contact visits he was having with his siblings. Through offering him advocacy and making the referral to staff within our office, they were able to talk to his social worker about his wishes, and he now sees more of his siblings and is a lot happier. I feel proud to be a part of this young man's life and pleased he has benefitted from getting to know me'

2. Independent Advocacy

Volunteering Matters are proud to have delivered the advocacy service for looked after children of Derby since its inception in 2004. Working closely within the national standards for the provision of children's advocacy we endeavour to make certain that children and young people are empowered, their rights respected and that their views and wishes are properly considered during the decision making process. We deliver a person centred service striving to ensure that children and young people feel valued and comfortable raising their concerns no matter how large or small they may appear. Children and young people benefit from committed, enthusiastic and well-trained volunteers motivated to deliver creative and effective support.

Referrals can be made by anyone and once received they are responded to within two working days, allocated based on suitability, complexity, location and availability. Location is not a barrier to our

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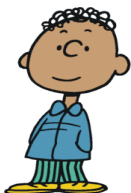
service; over the last year our advocates have travelled to Shropshire and Warrington, all over Derby and Derbyshire and continue to support young people in Kent, the age range of young people accessing the service has been 10 – 18. In every case, the advocate maintains close contact with the young person, reporting back to them at each stage only ever supporting within the parameters of their agreement. Whenever possible, the advocate will encourage the young person to self advocate.

2015-16 we received 49 referrals: 32 from children and young people in Derby, 13 from children and young people at a distance, 4 from children and young people in Derbyshire.

These figures are consistent with 2014/15 which had seen a massive increase of 121% on previous years. Independent advocacy is entirely confidential, the child or young person can speak honestly with their advocate safely in the knowledge that the advocate will not share information without their express permission – unless in matters of safeguarding. The referrals received are varied, though often relate to the child/young persons wish to have increased contact with their family. We have included a selection of cases reflective of 2015-16, in the interests of anonymity – they are presented in this way:-



Patty has recently moved into an emergency foster placement. Social services requested independent advocacy to help her prepare for the looked-after child review and to make sure that she is happy in her new placement. With the help of her independent advocate Peppermint Patty knew that her voice was heard and her views were taken into account in decisions made about her future.



Charlie is 11 and has special needs. He will soon finish primary school, doesn't know where will he go after that? No school placement has been identified for him. Charlie is supported by Independent Advocacy to request his social worker to find a suitable school and ready to make admissions appeal should a school decline admission.

Franklin lives in a children's home. He has to complete an age assessment conducted by social care. His advocate makes sure he understands the whole process. His advocate helps to ensure that Franklin understands the questions and the implications. Franklin was supported by his Independent Advocate before, during and after the assessment.



Lucy has autism and a learning disability. She is unhappy with her placement and has trouble with other services. She lacks confidence in her placement and social care. Lucy has an Independent Advocate to help her express her wishes and feelings in meetings and to liaise with services.

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Linus is placed out of area and misses his family. He would like more contact with his family. An Independent Advocate travelled to meet with him then agreed to liaise with Linus's social worker to try and resolve the difficulty on his behalf.

Non Instructed Advocacy – The Watching Brief

In 2015 -16 we are proud to have introduced to the Children's Rights Service non-instructed advocacy. Where a child or young person has no means of communication either due for example to severe learning disability or autism, Non-instructed advocacy is a means by which their wishes and feelings can be obtained. In order to give a truly independent and balanced view of what the child/young person might say if they were able to speak for themselves, we seek additional information from a variety of sources and collate it into an independent report handed to the decision maker. In order to complete this, we follow "the Watching Brief" a form of advocacy devised by ASIST. This is a style of advocacy that has been welcomed by social workers at the Light House – one said:

"This was another positive and supportive experience for all those involved in the meeting for customer XX. The Advocate was able to deliver an understanding of her role and I know this was appreciated by the professionals, carers and family friends who have very little experience of the role of the advocacy service. The advocate used a document to explain her role and this offered a breadth of clarity and understanding to the approach needed to consider XX's Best Interest.

The report it is very impressive and offers additional guidance and asks the relevant questions about how and whether we are meeting XX's needs. The document will also assist me as an adult social worker to fully consider specific details regarding XX's future Support Planning. Thank you".

The non-instructed advocate seeks to uphold the child/young person's rights; ensures fair and equal treatment and access to services; and make certain that decisions are taken with due consideration for their unique preferences and perspectives. This is a form of advocacy that provides the most vulnerable children with a voice.

Complaints

We have supported six young people to raise formal complaints against the local authority. Three of the complaints remain unresolved. The issues have been:

- Staying Put x 2
- Complaint against social worker
- Transition – lack of continuity of case worker and support to find housing at transition x 2
- Poor communication between young person and social care and resolution to issues

Advocacy Clinics at Residential Homes

In September 2015, it was agreed to re-instate the monthly advocacy clinics on a trial basis and to monitor impact. Initially there were teething problems, some staff felt advocates were present to

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monitor their own work, young people were sometimes absent at the time of visits and some had difficulty understanding the role. However, by providing continuity of advocate, establishing the optimum time for visits and ensuring a robust reporting system, the clinics are now firmly established.

September 2015 – March 2016 there have been monthly visits to most homes (and latterly all) generating 10 separate referrals (requests for support). This has been particularly noticeable at The Shine – providing support to the most vulnerable of children and young people, staff there have welcomed and utilised the independent support offered by advocacy.

A Volunteer's Account of Advocacy clinics:

"As an Independent Advocate last September I started holding monthly advocacy clinics at a local Children's Home. The clinics give the advocates the opportunity to get to know the people at the Home, and for the young people living there to get to know about the advocacy service and also start to build some trust in the advocates.

To be honest, at first, it was difficult for everyone. Members of staff were naturally one assumed I was there to monitor them and their work with the young people. Likewise, the young people didn't know why I was there, in many cases weren't aware of their rights to have an advocate, and one asked why I was there when they'd already got a social worker, a key worker and an Independent Reviewing Officer to talk to.

After nine months, that has all changed: I had one referral from a young lady who was very unhappy with her social worker, couldn't talk to her, said the social worker didn't listen to her, and it transpired this had been the case for a couple of years. When the young lady joined the Home at Christmas, she had told the members of staff about the problem and they advised her to see how she felt after settling in. But after a further couple of months nothing had changed, she complained again and a member of staff referred her to me. I spoke to her about it, we discussed her options and she elected to write a letter to the social worker's manager, expressing the reasons why they didn't get on, and requesting a change. The manager listened and her social worker was changed.

On the back of this referral, I then had a young man approach me who wasn't happy with a decision the Home's Manager had taken with regards to bedroom allocations, and didn't understand the reasons behind the answer. In this situation, and with agreement with the young man, I spoke directly to the Manager. There were legitimate safeguarding issues relating to his decision, he was sorry the young man didn't understand the initial response, but promised he would have another talk with him and better explain the reasons in terms he would understand.

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I feel so privileged to have been in a position to help the young people. My reward is seeing the smiles I now get from both staff and the young people each time I visit the Home."

3. Advocacy support at Initial Child Protection Conference

We provide independent advocacy support for children/ young people at initial child protection conference. Meeting with the child/ young person to obtain their wishes and feelings and take these to the conference ourselves or supporting the child / young person to do so. We would only ever meet with the child/young person if that is their wish and with the express permission of their parents.

Within a very short time frame (sometimes as little as three days notice), we operate a well organised and coordinated service whereby we contact the social worker, schools and sometimes parents – obtaining brief case detail and instructing advocates to meet with the child/young person. Where ever possible, advocates attend in pairs –to aid communication ensuring complete transparency and accurate note taking. On occasion, we have had several advocates involved in the one case due to the number of children within the family.

Advocates meet with the child/young person, explains their role and the purpose of their visit, they speak to them about the conference and help them to express the wishes and feelings they would like to share. Following consultation with child protection Chairs, advocates ask the child/young person about their understanding of the concerns held by social care and feed this information back to the conference – with the agreement of the child/young person. Advocates meet with children as young as six years tailoring their style accordingly – words, pictures and even rapping have been used to support children to participate.

2015-16 we supported 68 children/young people to participate in 38 separate conferences exceeding our target of 20 children and young people.

NB: by agreement with the Chairs of conference and Derby City Council, on two occasions, notes were submitted only and the advocate did not attend in person - this was due to capacity.

A volunteer's account of advocacy within child protection:

"I have spoken to more than a dozen children over the last year in matters relating to Child Protection cases. It can sometimes be distressing to hear about their current situation and learn about the turmoil the family is going through, but by capturing the essence of how happy or sad, or safe or unsafe they are feeling, and then presenting that to the Child Protection Conference, I believe we are doing our best to help the children to have a voice, and help those tasked with keeping them safe make the right decisions about the children's future"

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4. The Children In Care Council (CiCC)

The CiCC is for all children and young people with care experience highlighting issues affecting them. It provides a platform where young people may speak about things that matter to them & contribute towards positive changes benefitting all. The meetings are fun & functional. The CiCC dine together, and discuss matters that are important to them. Meetings have a structure, designed to enhance skills and to be child friendly. Each meeting follows a similar format:

- Meetings follow an agenda so all present understand what the meeting is about and when things will happen;
- Children and Young people decide together what matters & what needs to change;
- CiCC agree on and Invite guests - if they feel they may have opportunities or information that could be useful
- CiCC plan events, activities, trips & training that are fun & useful to them



The young people take turns to chair meetings, be welcome members or to assist with refreshments. Meetings are lively and purposeful. Minutes are taken and distributed by post or email. During the second half of the year the young people have taken ownership of the meetings. They designed their own logo, introduced loyalty cards, membership cards and agreed to a new structure for meetings.

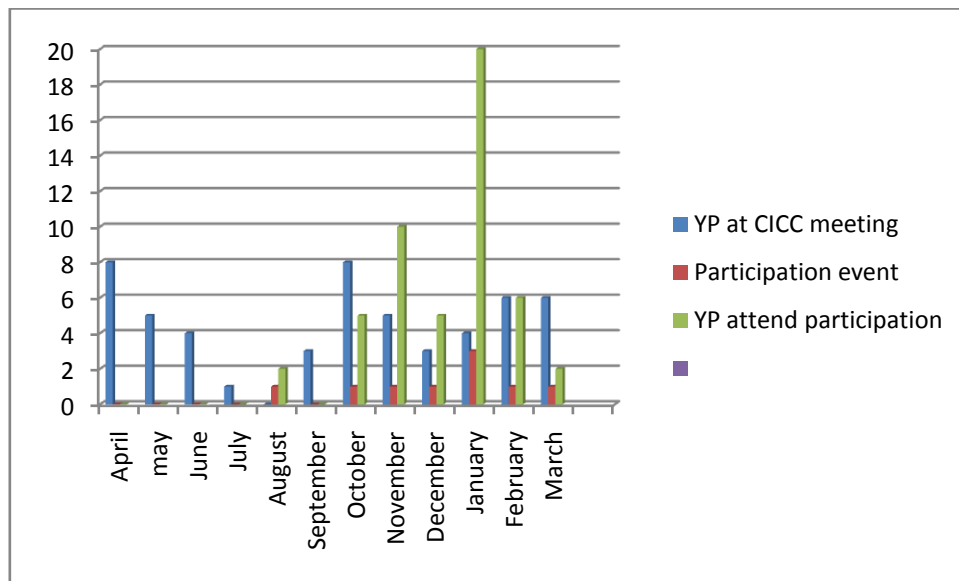


The CiCC expressed an interest in learning more about the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child therefore at most meetings, the young people select two countries and sample food, flags and facts about those countries as well as looking at the rights.



Attendance at the CiCC regular meetings fluctuates but has stabilized during the last quarter – opportunities have significantly increased due to collaborative working with the corporate parent. Opportunities attract interest from additional young people enhancing the work carried out by core members.

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The largest project undertaken by the CICC 2015 – 16 was the launch of the new Pledge. During the summer months the CICC consulted with other looked after young people by questionnaire and open forum. The information gathered provided a base from which to develop a revised Pledge – reflective of the young people's wishes and feelings. Volunteering Matters liaised with Derby City Council to seek their views as to how these findings could be incorporated to ensure that the finished article would be a meaningful and workable document for both looked after children and their corporate parent. The CICC were invited to the Council Chamber in January for the official launch.



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The CICC are proud of all of their achievements in 2015 -16, through hard work and dedication the young people have made a difference to the lives of all looked after children from Derby:

- Re-written the Pledge & will work with Derby City Council to help achieve these goals
 - Helped with social worker training
 - Provided feedback to Derby about their residential Children's homes
 - Designed their own logo & decided where and when meetings are held
 - Campaigned for Internet Access to Children's Homes
- Met with other CICC to share their views on what matters & swap ideas on how to make positive changes
 - Provided feedback about services & changes that need to happen
- Campaigned for a One Page Profile for social workers to be given to all looked after children
 - Consulted on the new framework for residential and foster care
- Participated in NHS consultation regarding their experience of health services
 - Participated on staff recruitment for Volunteering Matters

The existing Children in Care Council comprise of a dedicated group of young people and encouraging others to get involved is an on going matter. In addition to the approach already adopted, Volunteering Matters wish to hold social events to reach out to the wider audience of foster carers and their families, building relationships with younger children to secure attendance in later years. Recognising that young people communicate by social media is also a matter under review. Finally,



great emphasis and focus should be placed on the achievements of the existing CiCC, Volunteering Matters are proud to be associated with them.

Evaluation of The Children's Rights Service & Development

Independent Visitor service development 2016 +

It is important to work closely with our partners in social care to ensure the independent visitor service is made accessible to all those eligible to benefit from it. We will continue to develop links with the residential children's homes, the foster care association and social workers to publicise the service. Word of mouth is a useful means of publicity and the children themselves are the strongest ambassadors we have. We will continue to recruit volunteers from around the Country, to ensure we provide Independent Visitors for those young people living at a distance.

Child Protection Conference advocacy service development 2016+

It is of note that 56% of CPC notifications received do not materialise. In some cases advocacy is not appropriate due to the age of the children or parents do not consent, however, in 49 % we receive no response from the social worker to the offer of advocacy support. When advocacy is used, social workers report that it is greatly beneficial i.e. parents hear first hand how their child/young person feels about life – often reinforcing observations made by social workers. We will continue to liaise with team managers offering training and information about advocacy and are pleased that after liaising with the education and training officer, we have the opportunity to speak with newly qualified social workers as part of their formal training process.

Independent Advocacy service development 2016+

Efficient and timely file reviews to ensure matters are resolved as quickly as possible for children and young people. Effective continued communication about the role and purpose of advocacy to social care professionals / foster carers and independent visitors to ensure that make relevant referrals. Continued encouragement and development of the advocacy team to ensure non instructed advocacy becomes further embedded into existing services.

The Children In Care Council service development 2016+

Partnership working with the Corporate Parenting Committee is critical if the CiCC is to achieve its purpose. Currently the CiCC are represented at Corporate Parenting Committee by Volunteering Matters staff. This is a matter to be reviewed and developed. Having researched the practice of other local authorities – in order to raise the profile of the CiCC and demonstrate the genuine commitment held by the Corporate Parenting Committee to the CiCC - Volunteering Matters wish to consult both regarding the current and future relationship between them. Trust, respect and good humour sit at the heart of all positive working relationships - with this in mind, we wish to seek the views of both for suggestions as to how we can continue to develop the role of the CiCC within the committee and raise their profile generally. Suggestions may include:



Total Respect Training work shop – facilitated by Plus One

Sports match social care professionals v CICC and other looked after children

CICC attendance at Corporate Parenting committee for an awards ceremony

In conclusion

2015-16 has been a successful year for the children's rights service where Volunteering Matters have continued to deliver a high quality service. Responding to all referrals within a strict 48 hour time frame, keeping up to date with social workers to ensure we keep abreast of changes impacting young people on our waiting list and working in close partnership with Derby City Council to assist them in raising standards for looked after children in their care.