

Corporate Parenting Committee

Derby Children's Rights Service

Annual Report

April 2022 – March 2023

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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 2022/2023 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. This report has been produced for Derby City Council's Corporate Parenting Committee.

1.1 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 2022/2023 this included recruiting and training volunteers from locations such as Hereford, Mansfield, North Derbyshire, Northampton, Nottingham, Lincolnshire, South Derbyshire, Stoke on Trent, Walsall.

Independent visitors are matched with a child/young person where there is little or no communication or contact with their birth family, and it is thought to be in their best interest based on several reasons which might include becoming isolated, experiencing difficulties in communication, or building positive relationships. It is a voluntary participation and therefore the child/young person must consent to the referral being made – starting every relationship in this way means the child/young person will feel in control.

An independent visitor provides monthly support on an individual basis. The aim is to provide an 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?

1.2 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 National Standards and strive to ensure the advocacy service is highly visible and accessible 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.

1.3 Independent Advocacy at Child Protection Conference

Where a family become involved in initial child protection proceedings and the children/young people are over the age of 5 years, a referral to the Change Grow Live advocacy team will be issued by the responsible social worker.

Provided prior consent from the primary carer has been granted, our advocates will then meet with each child/young person, usually at their school, to seek their wishes and feelings which are then shared with the Child Protection manager. Initial Child Protection Conferences are mainly face-to-face now, and fewer are being held virtually.

1.4 Independent Advocacy at Residential Homes in Derby

Change Grow Live advocates provide monthly clinics at the local authority residential homes in Derby. They arrange for a convenient time to call, and staff encourage the young people to engage with the advocate during the visit. Occasionally young people self-refer if there is a matter arising, though sometimes young people just wish to chat with an advocate. By ensuring the same advocate attends it provides continuity and enables trusting relationships to build.

2 Independent Visitor Service Report

2.1 Young People Figures

<i>Referrals & Matching - Independent Visitor Service</i>	<i>Total</i>
Young people referred to the service	7
Young people newly matched	6
Year-end on-going relationships in Derby City	7
Year-end on-going relationships less than 20 miles away	13
Year-end on-going relationships out of area > 20 miles	11
Referrals withdrawn due to change in circumstances (Including young people who were waiting a rematch)	10
Number of match ends	10
Young people awaiting an IV at year end	5

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.

2.2 Young People Demographics

<i>Young Person Matched with an Independent Visitor</i>	<i>Total</i>
Male	19
Female	12
SEN (With formal diagnosis)	9
White British	23
Mixed white British	1
Black British	0
Asian British	2
Other	5

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, and 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 volunteer has been vetted, trained, and approved as an Independent Visitor, they are matched with the child/young person.

The relationship is reviewed by our project staff at least twice a year to explore how it is developing, with monitoring of the match ongoing through monthly contact with the volunteers. If young people are moved the aim is to retain the support of their Independent Visitor, though this can be challenging if they are moved considerable distances from their previous area. We have a number of Independent Visitor relationships where volunteer and young person have been matched for many years, and some volunteers have remained friends with their match after the formal relationship ends.

2.2.1 Residual Issues due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The start of the 2022/23 year saw the end of volunteers and staff having to complete Covid risk assessments relating to contact with and transporting of the children and young people; the risk assessments needed to be signed off by a line manager prior to every visit.

However, whilst this period appeared to be the start of a return to 'business as usual', there were residual impacts of the pandemic on existing matches; volunteers suffering with Long-Covid and unable to continue visits; volunteers re-evaluating their own family priorities and deciding they were unable to continue; or cases of Covid continuing to appear, albeit in milder forms, thereby delaying planned face to face visits.

Another side effect was that some children and young people struggled with maintaining a relationship with their Independent Visitor during the pandemic; letter writing, telephone calls or video meetings hadn't worked for them; the relationships only worked based on them going out and doing activities together. Consequently, after the pandemic a small number of visits ended, with the young people deciding they no longer wish to have an Independent Visitor.

The 2022/23 year has also seen a significant drop in the number volunteer applications compared to pre-pandemic levels. Having discussed this with colleagues on the National Independent Visitor Network, this trend has been recognised by service providers across the UK, so not just a challenge for the Derby Children's Rights Service.

2.2.2 Cost of Living Challenges

For the last couple of years, the budget for individual visits has been set at £10 per young person per month. As the cost-of-living crisis deepens, volunteers have struggled to find affordable activities; the cost at many venues (cinema, crazy golf, bowling, trampolining etc.) has increased substantially over the last year; many venues where previously they would admit volunteers at reduced or zero rates, are now saying they are struggling and are having to charge the going rates.

Despite the struggle, there have been some successes with obtaining additional support for our volunteers; in August 2022, Moorways Water Park in Derby agreed to allow Independent Visitors free access when supporting a looked after child or young person at the venue; Circus Starr provided a small number of free tickets to accessible circus events in Derby and Nottingham during April 2023.

Activities Undertaken

During 2022/23 children, young people and their independent visitors have continued to take part in a good range of activities, with some examples below:

- Adventure Golf, Nottingham
- Alter Rock, Derby
- Board games café, Nottingham
- Bolsover Castle, Derbyshire
- Brick Corner Café, Buxton
- Calk Abbey, Derbyshire
- Caravan Exhibition, NEC, Birmingham
- Cat Café, Nottingham
- Clip n Climb, Derby
- Crazy Golf at various locations
- Cresswell Crag cave tour, Derbyshire
- Crich Tramway Village, Derbyshire
- Cycling around local nature reserves
- Day trip to Weston Supermare
- Nottingham Christmas Market
- Padley Gorge walk, Peak District
- Paint a Pot at various locations
- Pantomime – Ugly Duckling Derby Theatre
- Playing with football on local park
- Railway Centre, Butterley, Derbyshire
- Rollerworld, Derby
- Shopping at Victoria Centre, Nottingham
- Snooker and Pool, various locations
- Special meal at Frankie and Bennie's
- Splash Zone, Long Eaton
- Table tennis, Lincoln
- Ten Pin Bowling at various locations
- The Sweet Lounge, Derby

- Dr Dolittle The Musical, Nottingham
- Elvaston Castle, Derbyshire
- Football Cup Match, Wembley
- Go Karting at various locations
- Great British Car Journey, Derbyshire
- Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire
- Horse Trekking, Derbyshire
- Jumpin Fun, Derby
- Kedleston Hall, Derbyshire
- Laser Tag, Nottingham
- League Football Match, Lincoln
- Lincoln Christmas Showground
- Lincolnshire Wolds Railway
- Litter picking around a local park
- Little Moreton Hall, Cheshire
- Christmas Wreath making, Elvaston Castle
- Markeaton Park, Derby
- Trail fishing lesson, Melton Mowbray
- Treasure Walk, Wollaton Park, Nottingham
- Twycross Zoo, Leicestershire
- Various Cinema visits
- Various Cosmos visits
- Various KFC visits
- Various McDonalds visits
- Various Pizza Express visits
- Various visits to Nando's
- Visit a park with a picnic
- Visit Santa at various locations
- Walking with IVs dog
- Water Park, Moorways, Derby
- White Post Farm, Nottinghamshire
- Witley Court, Worcester
- Wollaton Park, Nottingham
- Women's league cup match at Loughborough

2.3 Service Feedback – Independent Visitor

2.3.1 From Foster Carers

A yearly satisfaction survey was sent out to most of the matched children/young people, and we asked their carers or keyworkers to also complete and return a survey form. Some agreed to respond; a snapshot is provided below:

When asked if they believe the young person has benefited from the service, some foster carers or key workers commented:

- *"YP has become more confident in doing things on her own (without her brothers) and enjoys going out with her IV"*
- *"YP immediately jelled with his IV and has really enjoyed their meetings and trying new things"*
- *"YP has grown in confidence with his IV. He found it really tough at first as he doesn't feel comfortable with people he doesn't know really well"*
- *"He has something to look forward to"*

When asked if they have noticed a positive different to their foster child:

- *"Yes. She looks forward to going out with her IV and has tried new things"*
- *"Yes. YP has someone else to talk to and, as the IV has children of similar age, he gets comparisons"*
- *"Yes. YP is more engaged with the activities now and is enjoying their meetings"*
- *"Yes. YP is finding it easier to talk to other people"*

When asked if communication with Change Grow Live staff and volunteers has been satisfactory:

- *"We have no problems with the IV or CGL"*
- *"The contact with both - the IV and CGL is fine"*
- *"I've had no problems getting in touch with the IV or CGL"*
- *"Yes. Direct communication between volunteer & ourselves works really well"*

When asked if they would recommend Change Grow Live's services to another carer:

- *"Yes. It's been a very positive experience for the children"*
- *"Yes. It's been a very positive benefit"*
- *"Yes. The service is very positive and helps with independence and confidence"*
- *"Yes. Many young people in care have no-one outside of carers family. CGL provide this"*

2.3.2 From Young People

A yearly satisfaction survey was sent out to most of the matched children and young people, and we asked them to complete and return a survey form. Some agreed to respond; a snapshot is provided below:

When asked to describe their time with the CGL volunteer they said:

- o *"Great"*
- o *"Good because he makes me laugh"*
- o *"I would describe it as fun and exciting"*
- o *"It think it is good because it gives me things to do so I am busy"*
- o *" Exciting"*

When asked if they feel better since going out with their independent visitor they said:

- o *"Yes. I feel more confident"*
- o *"Yes, because I get a break from my sister"*
- o *"Yes, because I have got confident about going out on my own"*
- o *"Yes, because it keeps me busy", "It gives me something to look forward to"*
- o *"Fun, enjoyable"*

When asked if they had learnt any new skills, or want to try a new activity they said:

- o *"Yes, getting the bus"*
- o *"Yes, and I want to go to a football match"*
- o *"Yes. I'd like to try Karate"*
- o *"I have learnt that it's fun going out with other people"*

When asked if they would recommend the service to a friend, and why, they said:

- o *"Yes. It gives you more confidence"*
- o *"Yes, and I can tell them all the exciting things I do" ¹*
- o *"Yes because she is very good"*
- o *"I would because my friend likes going to new places and I can tell them where I have been"*
- o *"I would if I knew anyone who required it"*

¹ At the time of writing this report, a young person has recently recommended the IV service to a looked-after friend, and their social worker has now submitted a referral.

When asked if they would change anything about the service they said:

- o *"No. They are great"*
- o *"No, because it is really good"*
- o *"No, because it's a very good service"*
- o *"No, I think it's good enough"*

2.4 Soft Outcomes - Independent Visitor Service

2.4.1 Lose an IV; gain a friend

A volunteer had been matched for over four and a half years with a young person with additional needs; they had built up a wonderful relationship. Unfortunately, on medical grounds, the IV was forced to retire from volunteering and was no longer able to continue the monthly visits. Over several weeks the situation was discussed with young person, carer and social worker and an exit strategy worked out. The young person wished to remain in contact with the IV, on an ad-hoc basis, so it was agreed she would be considered as a friend of the family in her own right i.e., not linked to Change Grow Live. The young person would also be considered for another match with a new volunteer and put on the waiting list.

At the time of writing, we understand the young person has visited her former IV and husband at their home and have enjoyed baking sessions together; something that would have been difficult in the previous relationship.

2.4.2 On the spectrum; no formal diagnosis

A 14-year-old young man in a long-term placement with foster carers had been matched with his IV for around two years. He was not good in social situations, he didn't communicate very well with adults, and only enjoyed the same activity every visit – using the Pokémon mobile phone App to catch characters at a local park, with an occasional visit to a McDonalds. Despite only doing the same 'Groundhog Day' activities the young person appeared to have fun, and the IV was committed to supporting him in whatever he enjoyed.

Unfortunately, his behaviours generally started to deteriorate; he had been struggling in mainstream school for many years and eventually he was excluded. Home tutors were brought in, and he refused to engage with them. On one visit whilst the IV was transporting him, he started being silly and playing with the car door handles, so as a precaution, transporting was temporarily stopped, with walking visits in the local area being the only solution. Change Grow Live also became involved in regular multi-agency meetings in an effort to understand how best to support the young man. It transpired the Independent Visitor was the only external person he would entertain going out with.

After appropriate risk assessments were completed and mitigations put in place; should the young man act up again, the IV was allowed to transport him again. Their next visit happened to coincide with the Christmas season, and the IV reported:

"This was a really nice visit and a real insight into my YP. He was like a 6-year-old. He wanted to see Santa, get a toy (which he cuddled for the rest of the visit) and chase bubbles. He didn't interact with the other children and his movements were stilted and awkward, but he wasn't self-conscious."

The visits continued, with just one episode of having to restrict transporting for 'silliness', and to date, the Independent Visitor remains a consistent person in this young man's life.

2.4.3 Three siblings moved in as many months

Without any notice to the IV service, the siblings were moved placement: two of the matched siblings to another town. Eventually, the IV service managed to obtain their new temporary placement details, and through the goodwill of the volunteers they arranged short notice visits with the young people. It transpired they were only in bridging care until a permanent placement could be found. When they eventually moved again, two of the volunteers were able to continue with visits, though unfortunately the third could no longer commit to the service, and the young person was offered another IV.

3 Independent Advocacy Service Report

3.1 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.

In 2022-23 we supported 18 children/young people to participate in conferences, 25 including reviews. Quite often we consult 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 professionally managed, it is common 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.

3.1.1 Young People Demographics

<i>Child Protection Advocacy</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>White British</i>	15
<i>White European</i>	0
<i>Asian</i>	0
<i>Black</i>	0
<i>Other</i>	3

<i>Child Protection Advocacy</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>5 - 10 years</i>	9
<i>11 - 15 years</i>	8
<i>16 - 17 years</i>	1
<i>Males</i>	9
<i>Females</i>	9

3.2 Issue Based Advocacy

3.2.1 Young People Figures

Referrals Independent Advocacy Service	Total
<i>Young people referred to the service 2022-23</i>	59
<i>Young people in Derby</i>	19
<i>Young people out of area or at a distance</i>	40
<i>Visits to Derby City Residential Homes</i>	24
<i>Number of matters raised for young people</i>	59
<i>Number of matters closed for young people</i>	63
<i>On-going open cases at end of March 2023</i>	48

3.2.2 Young People Demographics

Young Person Demographics Independent Advocacy	Total
<i>White British</i>	31
<i>White European</i>	8
<i>Mixed (White Caribbean)</i>	2
<i>Mixed (White African)</i>	0
<i>Mixed (White Asian)</i>	6
<i>Pakistani</i>	0
<i>Asian</i>	4
<i>Other</i>	8

3.2.3 Matters Raised by Children and Young People

Issues raised - Independent Advocacy Service	Total
<i>Home – living arrangements</i>	19
<i>Support during a review</i>	12
<i>Education</i>	1
<i>Support with leaving care workers & transition</i>	2
<i>Other</i>	25

Matters defined as “other” are varied and include signposting to services such as health, independent visitors, solicitors, support obtaining a passport and birth certificate, 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.

3.3 Formal Complaints

Whenever possible, advocates seek resolution on behalf of the young person and occasionally a young person may choose to raise a formal complaint. During 2022-2023 no formal complaints were raised.

3.4 Service Feedback – Independent Advocacy

Comment from IRO reporting back after meeting with YP :-

"I have been out to see YP today and he is happy with the support and advocacy that he has received from your advocate and feels that the things that he has wanted to happen have been achieved and progress has been made. He does not feel that he needs further advocacy at this time and does not need advocate to attend his review next week. I have suggested to YP that if he changes his mind on further advocacy at any time, I or one of the workers at the residential home can quickly get back in touch with you and YP is happy to leave it like that."

4 Commissioners

The project has been providing a service in partnership with Derby City Council for 6 years; during that time, we have built a strong positive relationship with professionals in a variety of distinct roles and 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.

5 Networking

We network with other local and national charitable agencies who share opportunities regarding training, grants, and networking events. When invited, we participate in the children and young people network meetings facilitated by Derby City Council. We attend volunteer recruitment events around the Midlands.

5.1 Children and Young People

Change Grow Live recognise that participation was key to our success in 2022-23, we:

- Started to attend Social Workers team meetings to raise the profile of the project, discuss criteria for referring for Independent Visiting and Advocacy, and share new marketing materials. This also allowed, in many cases, staff to meet face-to-face. The Haddon Children's Services team meeting was attended virtually, and the Child Protection team were visited at the Kedleston Road site. There are plans to have further meetings with Chatsworth and Kedleston Children's Services teams in the coming months.
- After sharing existing leaflets about our service with the Children in Care Council, we listened to their comments and fed back to the Change Grow Live Marketing Team, who have now produced new materials which are starting to be shared with children, young people, and professionals.

5.2 Student Social Workers

During 2022/2023 Change Grow Live liaised with Derby University and took on one student social worker on short-term placement. She helped coordinate volunteer supervision meetings, produced a Spring Newsletter for the children and young people and worked on issues-based advocacy cases.

6 Best Practice

6.1 Referrals for Independent Visitor Service

Change Grow Live receive referrals from social workers; the appointment of an Independent Visitor is considered when it appears to be in the child's best interests to do so and is based on lack of, or infrequent, parental communication.

To benefit from the Independent Visitor service, it is critical the child or young person agrees with the referral being made. When 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. After referral acceptance, staff visit the child/young person to complete a person-centred initial assessment, before commencing a targeted volunteer recruitment campaign.

6.2 Referrals for 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.

6.3 Best 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 (2016). We attend specialist training delivered by third party organisations to improve our skills and update our knowledge.

As a minimum, volunteer advocates are trained to City & Guilds Level 2 Independent Advocacy (3610-02), or equivalent, and are supervised by a Senior Advocate. Any sessional workers are trained to, or working towards, City and Guilds Independent Advocacy Practice (3614) standards with units covering principles and practice, legislation, entitlement and access to independent advocacy, and children and young people.

6.4 Recording Data

We follow all guidance relating to the Data Protection Act 2018, which is the UK Implementation of the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Change Grow Live only collect information if we need it, keep the data we hold up-to-date, only hold data as long as is necessary, and 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.

6.5 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.

6.6 Volunteers

Change Grow Live train applicants under their 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, virtual and online training (including safeguarding, data protection, boundaries etc), enhanced DBS check, references, assessment pack and pre-commencement interview. Volunteers do not meet with a child/young person until all stages are complete.

6.7 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.

After seeing their young person, the independent visitor returns a confidential and secure contact sheet. 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 action plan and giving the young person the choice on how to proceed. The young person always remains in control of the relationship and information is not shared with third parties without the permission of the young person.