

**Corporate Parenting Committee
Derby Children’s Rights Service
Annual Report
April 2021 – March 2022**

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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 2021/2022 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 2021/2022 this included recruiting and training volunteers in locations such as Derbyshire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, South Yorkshire, Staffordshire.

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 support monthly, with a telephone call or correspondence between visits, on an individual basis if appropriate. 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?

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 the The National Standards for the Provision of Children's Advocacy Services 2002, 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 4 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. During the pandemic, Initial Child Protection Conferences were being held virtually, and continue to do so.

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.

For a good part of 2021, due to the pandemic advocate access to the residential homes had been restricted, though some meetings were held virtually or outside. However, over the last eight months the number of physical visits has increased again; with access to the homes being guided by Derby City Council Covid-safe requirements and Change Grow Live risk assessments.

2 Independent Visitor Service Report

2.1 Young People Figures

Referrals & Matching - Independent Visitor Service	Total
Young people referred to the service	24
Young people newly matched	15
Year-end on-going relationships in Derby City	6
Year-end on-going relationships less than 20 miles away	12
Year-end on-going relationships out of area > 20 miles	17
Referrals withdrawn due to change in circumstances	8
Number of match end	17
Young people awaiting an IV at year end	14

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

Young Person Matched with an Independent Visitor	Total
Male	20
Female	15
SEN	12
White British	26
Mixed white British	2
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 twice a year as minimum to explore how the relationship is developing. We have a several Independent Visitor relationships 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.

2.3 Independent Visitor Activities

2.3.1 Challenges due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The start of the 2021/22 year continued to be a challenge for the Independent Visitor service, with suspended direct contact visits for all our volunteers, young people, and staff alike. However, Covid vaccines were starting to be rolled out and the UK Government allowed the re-opening of some venues during the Spring and early Summer of 2021, though social contact rules continued to apply in all settings with no indoor mixing between different households being allowed.

Many of the children/young people on the service were missing face to face contact with their volunteers. Despite attempts to maintain relationships via telephone, letters or even video contact sessions, for many they were uncomfortable with those forms of communication, and they were missing the ability to go out with 'their personal IV.'

To allow volunteers to undertake socially distanced visits with the children/young people in their local area, Change Grow Live implemented Personal Covid Risk Assessments with all their volunteers; to understand how the individuals feel about the current Covid situation, if they or their immediate family will be put at further unnecessary risk, and to confirm they are happy to carry out the visits.

Activity based Covid Risk Assessment forms were introduced by Change Grow Live. This required volunteers, 24 hrs before visits were due to take place, to check and confirm they and the carer's families were symptom free, what activities they and the child/young person were planning and the precautions they would take: face masks, hand hygiene, social distancing etc., the Activity risk form was then approved by Change Grow Live staff.

Despite all the precautions, some visits to young people in residential units were still refused, either due to local lockdown situations at the unit or a consideration by key workers that some young people would be at too great a risk to have further contacts outside of their unit or schooling.

On a positive note, many volunteers managed to undertake socially distanced local visits, and in a few instances, foster carers or key workers agreed to transport the young people to an outdoor venue, to allow them to meet up for a short while with their volunteer.

As 2021 progressed, lifting of some restrictions was announced by the UK Government, and Change Grow Live commenced allowing volunteers to transport children/young people to attend venues as they re-opened. The visits were controlled with the addition of a Transporting Covid Risk Assessment form, completed by the volunteer in advance, along with the previously mentioned controls, all to be approved by staff.

The UK appeared to move out of lockdown, and in the August of 2021 more Covid rules were relaxed. Change Grow Live removed the need for volunteers to complete the individual Activity and Transport Covid Risk Assessment forms and replaced them with a generic Covid risk assessment detailing all the control measures the volunteers and staff were expected to maintain.

As Christmas 2021 approached the UK Government announced a further limited lockdown due to the emergence of a new highly transmissible variant of Covid. Appreciating everyone's personal circumstances were unique, several volunteers and members of staff felt it was not appropriate for anything other than indirect contact with the children/young people; though they aimed to stay connected via telephone calls, video calls or letters etc. For others, only socially distanced visits would be possible. Overall, many felt able to continue to transport their matched child or young person to outdoor venues, with the carers' permission, so Change Grow Live returned to using the Activity and Transport Covid Risk Assessment controls introduced previously.

Towards the end of March 2022 Change Grow Live again removed the need for volunteers to use the previous Covid Risk Assessment forms and returned to the generic Covid controls implemented the previous Summer.

2.3.2 Activities Undertaken

During 2021/22 children, young people and their independent visitors have still managed to take part in a good range of activities, with some examples below:

- Virtual jewellery making session
- Virtual pamper sessions
- Virtual film nights
- Virtual baking session
- Foot Golf at various locations
- Cycling at Clumber Park, Worksop
- Go Karting, Stretton Circuit, Leicestershire
- Taking volunteers' pet dogs for walks in local parks
- Walks and nature watching in local parks
- Cycling at Besthorpe Nature Reserve, Newark
- Cycling on the Tissington Trail, Derbyshire
- Go Ape Nets Adventure, Sherwood Forest
- Watch FA Girl's Youth Plate Cup Final (u16s) at Loughborough
- Cycling on the Wood Farm Trail, Ashby-de-la-Zouch
- Go Karting at Nottingham
- Tobogganing at Tamworth

- Ice Skating at Sheffield
- Watch England v Wales Six Nations rugby match at Twickenham
- Visit Twycross Zoo
- Play tennis and badminton at a sports centre, Derbyshire
- Visit White Post petting farm, Nottinghamshire
- Go tenpin bowling, Derby
- Visit Newark Castle and Gardens, Notts
- Going to the Cinema, various locations
- Eating at Bella Italia, Mansfield
- Pottery painting at Crazy Glaze, Mansfield
- Ice Skating at Bretby Garden Centre
- Visit Newark Aircraft Museum, Notts
- Visit to the Great British Car Journey Museum, Derbyshire
- Visit Blackpool Illuminations, Lancashire
- Play darts and snooker at various locations – Riley, CueBall, Corkers
- Visit Royal Observatory, London
- Visit Greenwich Maritime Museum
- Visit to Sherwood Forest light railway, Notts
- Visit Santa Clause at Whisby Garden Centre, Lincolnshire
- Catching Pokémon characters around various locations
- Visit to Woodside Wildlife Park, Newbold, Lincolnshire
- Paint a Pot at Markeaton Craft Centre, Derby
- Visit to Cadbury World, Birmingham
- Roller Skating at Derby
- Watch pre-season football match Manchester United vs Everton
- Climbing Wall at Tamworth
- Visit Tropical Butterfly House, Sheffield
- Visit Peak Wildlife Farm, Staffordshire
- Visit Belvoir Castle, Notts
- Visit Gunthorpe Locks and Marina, Notts
- Southwell Minster and Bishops Palace, Notts
- Cycling at Sherwood Pines, Notts
- Walk and football kick-about Bradgate Park, Leicester
- Hollywood Bowl, Leicester
- Visit to Calke Abbey, Derbyshire
- Visit the Devonshire Dome restaurant, Buxton
- Orienteering in Padley Gorge area, Derbyshire
- Visit antiques and crafts centres, various locations
- Visit Science Museum, London
- Visit Jodrell Bank, Cheshire
- Walk around Rufford Abbey and Sculpture Park, Notts
- Christmas shopping and meal at Meadowhall, Sheffield
- Geocaching around various locations
- Cycling around Carsington Water, Derbyshire
- Nature watch with binoculars, Collingham, Notts
- Visit to Museum of Making, Derby

2.4 Service Feedback – Independent Visitor

2.4.1 From Foster Carers

A yearly satisfaction survey was carried out with most of the matched children/young people, and some of their carers or keyworkers agreed to respond and share their feedback. A snapshot is provided below.

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

- *“They feel more more morally boosted, self esteem is better, feels more positive. IV is friendly.”*
- *“It has been nice for them to have another adult to talk to, and they have benefitted from the one to one”*
- *“She enjoys it, has been out and about – it’s built confident and self esteem - and she looks forward to the visits”*
- *“She has enjoyed session, comes home really happy and wants to tell us all about the visit”*
- *“It’s good to have somebody else to have a relationship with – good for confidence – good to get attention”*
- *“The IV and YP have built up a good relationship”*
- *“Social skills have improved - very inward before, but now more open. Not taking issues out on carer, more socially open and developes friendships easier”*

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

- *“More confident, less isolated and more talkative”*
- *“Makes more effort to get dressed for school. Has a different attitude with going out (more positive). Takes more responsibility for himself.”*
- *“Seems more confident, self-esteem has improved and they enjoy the service”*
- *“More confident. Comes back happy cos had a good time. Comes back in a good mood”*
- *“Yes, she is happy about the service and again, is eager to tell us”*
- *“The children are ‘quite damaged’ so will take quite a lot to change them”*
- *“A lot more communicative than she used to be and is more confident”*

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

- o *"They contact so very organised"*
- o *"They swap messages to arrange times"*
- o *"Working with the IV has been a breakthrough – he opens up more"*
- o *"We get emails and texts, get notices for when the IV is coming, asks if things will be suitable - very collaborative"*
- o *"Always been able to get hold of a staff member when needed"*

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

- o *"Yes, good service for young people to access"*
- o *"Yes, because YP enjoys it and makes her feel good. They are nice and friendly and a good match"*
- o *"Yes, the service is very positive and helps with independence and confidence"*
- o *"Does what it says on the 'tin' - to provide somebody who is independent and helps, trust-worthy and helps build confidence etc"*
- o *"Yes. Somewhere else you can turn to and somewhere else you can get help and support from"*
- o *"Yes. Non judgemental service has helped the YP improve on behaviour"*
- o *"Yes, because IV is good at her job, is on time, informative, calm and professional. A good impact on YP"*

When asked if there is anything they would change about the service:

- o *"No, satisfied with the service. However, as I have 2 YP's it would be nice to have the IVs on the same day"*
- o *"No, because they do what said they would"*
- o *"No, everything is good. We are very happy with the service provided"*
- o *"Yes. Used to get more money – but this has been cut. Be good to get some more funding"*
- o *"Would like the visits to be more regular (more than monthly)"*
- o *"Very happy with the service"*

2.4.2 From Young People

A yearly satisfaction survey was carried out with most of the matched children/young people and twelve agreed to respond and share their feedback. A snapshot is provided below.

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

- o *"It's a lot of fun to be out with them"*
- o *"She is kind, smiley, thoughtful and lovely. She is chatty, fun and has creative ideas"*
- o *"I really like what we do and we go to nice places. He is a really nice person"*
- o *"I enjoy the IV company, they are amazing"*
- o *"He is funny, friendly and likes football"*
- o *"We have been bike riding, picnic, and to a miniature steam railway. My volunteer is kind and funny"*

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

- o *"I feel more confident in a way, we have a few things in common & that makes me happy & relieved because we will be able to get to know each other more"*
- o *"Yes, he has took me to nice places I have never done before"*
- o *"I feel more confident and more independent"*
- o *"Yes, because I get time away from my brother and sister"*
- o *"Yes, because I'm on my own with her"*

When asked if they had learnt any new skills they said:

- o *"I've learnt things I didn't know"*
- o *"I don't really know, but I think talking more"*
- o *"Yes, creating my own pot. Its good to be able to share my ideas/thoughts & feelings aloud."*
- o *"Yes, we went geocaching. I'd like to go to a football match in the future"*
- o *"I learnt to drive a train"*

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

- o *"They will learn as well"*
- o *"Yes, because it grows your confidence and your independence in a way, and to me that's a good feeling"*
- o *"They take you to nice places and have never been to"*

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

- o “No, because I enjoy it as it is 😊”
- o “No, they are really so good”
- o “No, because it can’t get better”

2.4.3 From Volunteers

When asked what difference you think a volunteer makes, one replied:

“Our efforts, my efforts, make a difference to the young person; I have seen it. Their self-confidence grows, their ability to interact, take new steps, learn how to do things like map reading, when to catch a bus, how to catch a bus, making choices and understanding finances are all great examples of the difference I can make to a young person’s life.”

Another volunteer replied:

“It enables my young person to develop confidence and feel connected to the community; it gives them a sense of belonging. I think it helps young people to forget about the stressors of life and just be a child again and helps young people to develop as individuals.”

When asked to share a little success story, one replied:

“I believe my first match with a Young Person, who at the time was 15 and living in a residential home, has enabled that young person to expand their views and aspirations on what they can do in their life.

Fast forward to the end of 2021 and they are now doing a degree at university, living in the accommodation there and studying hard.

Their aspiration limits have been refreshed, they are maximising their potential and reaching new heights; they have done a lot of that themselves, I know that, but as their Independent Visitor, being able to reassure, mentor, coach and guide them has contributed to this outcome.”

Another volunteer replied:

“My last young person developed massively during our time together. They progressed amazingly in their academic ability and became extremely confident and independent. They now live independently in supported living and attend college as well as volunteer themselves. I feel that throughout our visits, they improved their ability to communicate and gained a sense of belonging, which has enabled them to progress an amazing amount in such a brief period.”

2.4.4 Additional Benefits of the Independent Visitor Role

2.4.4.1 IV became a Respite Carer

After being matched with his 15-year-old young person for over a year, our volunteer felt the young person had missed out on so many life opportunities and wanted to provide more than the Independent Visitor Role would allow. In consultation with the project and Children's Services, the volunteer and his wife applied to become Respite Carers in their own right, were vetted and approved. They now collaborate with the young man's foster carer to provide more targeted support outside of the Derby Children's Rights Service.

2.4.4.2 IV wanting to move job role into the CYP care sector

One volunteer was recruited to the Independent Visitor Role in Derby whilst continuing their full-time teaching role. After being matched with a young person with additional education needs, they were enjoying the service so much they decided to research additional training and are considering moving into the care sector.

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 2021-22 we supported 43 children/young people to participate in conferences. 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>	24
<i>White European</i>	7
<i>Asian</i>	1
<i>Black</i>	5
<i>Other</i>	6

Child Protection Advocacy	Total
5 - 10 years	16
11 - 15 years	22
16 - 17 years	5
Males	26
Females	17

3.2 Issue Based Advocacy

3.2.1 Young People Figures

Referrals Independent Advocacy Service	Total
Young people referred to the service 2021-22	55
Young people in Derby	24
Young people out of area or at a distance	31
Visits to Derby City Residential Homes	15
Number of matters raised for young people	55
Number of matters closed for young people	18
On-going open cases at end of March 2022	56

3.2.2 Young People Demographics

Young Person Demographics Independent Advocacy	Total
White British	30
White European	5
Mixed (White Caribbean)	6
Mixed (White African)	0
Mixed (White Asian)	2
Pakistani	0
Asian	1
Other	7

3.2.3 Matters Raised by Children and Young People

<i>Issues raised - Independent Advocacy Service</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Home – living arrangements</i>	25
<i>Support during a review</i>	10
<i>Education</i>	5
<i>Support with leaving care workers & transition</i>	2
<i>Other</i>	10

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.

3.3 Formal Complaints

Whenever possible, advocates seek resolution on behalf of the young person however, occasionally young person choose to raise a formal complaint. During 2021-22 one young person was supported to raise a formal complaint:

3.3.1 Locating Savings

A young person raised Stage 1 concerns relating to locating his savings. Unfortunately, this went to Stage 2 where it was finally resolved.

3.4 Service Feedback – Independent Advocacy

YP - Aged 10

I only talk to people I can trust, people who are by my side. People like you who don't react and say oh wow and be shocked, just listen and talk normally about it, not people who want to argue and disagree with it.

YP – Aged 18

"it's great knowing I have someone there who knows me, you know what I mean"

YP – Aged 16

YP Said “thank you so much”

4 Commissioners

The project has been providing a service in partnership with Derby City Council for 5 years; during that time, we have built a strong positive relationship with professionals in a variety of distinct roles and teams.

A new Senior Advocate started on the project in April 2021; they are continuing to build a good relationship with the commissioners.

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. In mid-2021 Change Grow Live presented to Derby City commissioners and IROs an overview of how they manage the advocacy lifecycle, from initial referral to conclusion.

5.1 Children and Young People

Change Grow Live recognise that participation is key to our success in 2021-22, we:

- Attended the Children in Care Council sharing existing leaflets about our service and gathered ideas on how the service could be better advertised – feedback has been returned to the Change Grow Live Marketing Team for their consideration.
- We listened to suggestions from children and young people around questions we ask volunteers on interview; we now include two specific questions on our forms: -
 - “What are the most important things about yourself that you’d want a YP you were matched with to know?”
 - “How prepared are you to commit yourself to this role?”
- We keep in touch with young people both awaiting a match and those already matched to obtain their feedback about our service. We offer a Buddy service for those awaiting a match, though most decline.

5.2 Student Social Workers

During 2021 Change Grow Live liaised with Derby University and took on three student social workers on short-term placement. One cooperated with the Derby Children’s Rights Service and produced a Spring Newsletter for the children and young people. Of note, they produced a new survey for young people and their foster carers/key workers and obtained improved service performance data for the project.

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 interests to do so and is based on lack of, or infrequent, parental communication, or the child has not been visited by (or lived with) a parent or anyone with Parental Responsibility during the preceding 12 months.

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.

6.2 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 attend specialist training delivered by third party organisations to improve our skills and update our knowledge.

6.3 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.

6.4 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 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 advocacy action plan. 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.

7 COVID-19

7.1 Challenges

7.1.1 Maintaining Visits

Some Independent Visitors have been unable to maintain regular physical visits, due to either the volunteer or child/young person, or members of their families, testing positive for Covid and visits cancelled. If this happens, the volunteers try and undertake additional visits in the following month.

In a couple of instances volunteers caught the virus, recovered from the initial symptoms, and are now suffering with long-Covid. They are struggling in their personal lives and struggle to maintain regular visits; Change Grow Live are monitoring those matches to see if the volunteer/young person relationship can be maintained, or in consultation with the young person, decide if they would prefer to wait until the volunteer is feeling better, or to be re-matched with another new Independent Visitor.

7.1.2 Maintaining Matches

Another challenge, as we come out of the restrictions placed on us by the pandemic, is that volunteers are re-evaluating their own priorities in life, and we have had far more volunteers leave the service during the last quarter of 2021/22 than other years.

Additionally, Change Grow Live Independent Visitor services, have this last quarter seen volunteer role online applications reduce to a third of the levels seen during the same quarter last year.

7.1.3 Recruitment Plans for 2022/23

Change Grow Live staff are due to return to more traditional forms of advertising; leaflet drops, posters in prominent and high-footfall locations and applying to be visiting guest speakers again at various institutions such as friendly societies, colleges, Universities etc.

Some Independent Visitor volunteers have completed short profiles; they explain who they are, why they volunteer, and any success stories related to their child/young person. Their profiles will be launched on the Children's Rights Service Facebook Page during June 2022, championing the Independent Visitor role, and celebrating all the amazing Change Grow Live volunteers during "Volunteers Week" with the hope of drawing in additional volunteers.

7.2 Positive Outcomes

7.2.1 Volunteer Applications

During the pandemic Change Grow Live saw higher than normal responses to advertised Independent Visitor roles, with many more applications than usual coming from professional people in child centred roles.

7.2.2 Service Improvements

During the early stages of the pandemic, Change Grow Live IT Services went into overdrive to support staff and ultimately the volunteers and service users across all the projects; staff were allocated laptop devices to enable them to work from home, new infrastructure and applications were implemented to allow for remote working and allowing staff to better communicate remotely with their customers and clients.

Change Grow Live quickly adapted their face-to-face training processes and became more agile by delivering volunteer training on Teams or Zoom. This format of training will stay, though probably moving towards a hybrid model as we all return to a 'new normal' situation.

7.2.3 Additional Funding During Covid Pandemic

During the Autumn of 2021, a charitable donation was given to Change Grow Live, with a requirement it was used to the benefit of children and young people supported by their diverse services. Projects were asked to bid for a portion of the monies; Derby Children's Rights Service won sufficient funds to provide approximately fifty young people with a £5 "One4All Multi-Store" Christmas gift card.