

CORPORATE PARENTING Annual Report 2019-20



INTRODUCTION

This report seeks to inform Members about the progress and outcomes for children in care and care leavers in Barnet for the period April 2019 - March 2020. It has appendices for the Annual Independent Reviewing Officer report, the Annual Fostering Report, Annual Adoption Report and Annual Virtual School Report.

At the start of 2019-20, Barnet Children's Services was on an improvement journey, following our Inadequate Ofsted Inspection in 2017. Barnet Council took considerable steps to transition and strengthen services at pace. At the heart of the improvement journey was the resilience-based practice approach we have implemented which holds the child central and builds on their strengths. In May 2019, a full Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) took place. Inspectors found the service to be 'good' across the four inspection domains:

- The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families
- The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection
- The experience and progress of children in care and care leavers
- Overall effectiveness



Nadhim Zahawi MP - Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families said...

"Ofsted's inspection report highlights numerous examples of strong practice across the service. The council has developed a well-integrated early help service that gives access to a broad range of preventive and targeted support, underpinned by strong partnerships. Staff are tenacious and thoughtful in their work, know their children well and are prepared to go the extra mile to ensure vulnerable children are well supported in all circumstances. I am also delighted to hear that there is suitable provision for care leavers who are well supported and have access to a good range of suitable accommodation."

Building on our momentum, 2019-20 has been a year of taking stock, reflecting on our service and developing our service; actioning our recommendations as we continue our journey to providing excellent services to our children and families consistently. Key areas of focus have been; ensuring that the children in our care remains central to all we do and plan; developing our placement sufficiency offer so that children are moved to the right care arrangement first time; strengthening their opportunities and educational outcomes through collaborative partnerships and innovations; ensuring we maximise opportunities and life chances for all our care experienced young people.

The year ended with the start of the global COVID-19 pandemic. We had to shift our thinking and planning very quickly and flexibly to adapt to new ways of working in what we now know have been unprecedented times, ensuring our children and carers continue to feel held, contained and supported and prepare for the unknown in relation to children that may need to be in care, children who needed to be moved and the impact of the anxieties that the pandemic created. We efficiently adapted to new ways of remote working to ensure children, young people and families could safely remain in contact with professionals, while we also planned for face to face contact with vulnerable children in the immediate and longer term so we can ensure that they are sufficiently safeguarded from harm.

In 2020-21, we continue to work in new ways, adapting as circumstances evolve consistently ensuring that children are safe, carers are supported and we enable children to access learning and support as needed. Moving forward recovery planning will be everyone's focus with schools reopening and lockdown restrictions easing, but also understanding and planning for the economic downturn affecting our children, young people and families.

Throughout 2019-20, and moving into 2020-21, our work has been underpinned by our five pledges for our children in care and care leavers:

OUR PLEDGES:

Pledge 1: A Good Education

We want every child to achieve well at school and college and will help them reach their potential.

We want to continue to achieve:

- Excellent education results; for our average Progress 8 score looked after children, Barnet was ranked 18th in 2019, out of 151 Local Authorities; and we are in top 10% for end of Key Stage 2 and GCSE's progress. 8% of care leavers continued to higher education compared to 6% nationally. We are ambitious for our children in care, and we want to see more children go onto to A-levels every year. In 2019/20, 5 children in care completed A-levels
- Each child keeping their school/college consistent wherever possible - Barnet has a lower rate of fixed term exclusions for children in care compared with the similar group nationally
- Successful partnership working with the Virtual School and schools/colleges to improve attendance and further strengthen the personal education plans
- Successful Transition Hub within the Virtual School, developing it further to enable the best possible support for children coming into our care
- All children having access to a laptop to support remote home learning and education during COVID-19 enforced lockdown
- Collaboration with the whole council, businesses in Barnet and the voluntary and community sector, to provide an increased number of work placements and apprenticeships for young people and care leavers. Barnet has a lower rate of care leavers not in education, employment or training (NEET) compared to the national average of 39%

Pledge 2: Feeling a Sense of Belonging

We want every child to be in a forever family where their needs are met and they are loved and nurtured.

We want to continue to achieve:

- All children and young people being listened to, with their views at the centre of any care plans
- A culture where we celebrate our young people and their achievements, including facilitated events such as care leavers week and Black History Month
- Most of our children in care being in foster care (63%), promoting it as our first choice. We are aiming to increase the numbers that are in Barnet in-house foster care (27%) and have revised our recruitment strategies
- That, as far as possible, all children in long term foster care are matched with their carers and supported to remain there till adulthood. We will focus on placement stability support for children when care arrangements become 'rocky' and ensure additional support is purposeful. In 2019-20, 63% remained in one placements
- Placement choices that are based on the need of the young person, and not their age. When necessary placements for young adults are extended beyond 18 to promote their development of independent skills. Furthermore, we want to continue to achieve increased numbers of young people staying put with their foster carers (11%), through promoting it to all 17 year olds in foster care
- Adoption being the right care plan, for the right children, without barriers of age, need or cultural matching; and continuing to ensure that they are well supported with their adoptive families. 9 children were adopted in 2019/2020, with 3 who were adopted in less than 1 year from when they entered care to when they were matched
- An effective response to the pandemic, were we place the children at the centre, ensuring that all children in our care and our care experienced young people are able to stay connected and do not feel isolated through the pandemic, including enabling our social workers and personal advisers to stay in contact with them through a variety of virtual means and direct contact throughout the pandemic

OUR PLEDGES:

Pledge 3: Keeping Healthy

We want every child to have a healthy and fulfilling life.

We want to continue to achieve:

- That all children under 9 have an initial health assessment with a paediatrician, and continue to ensure that all children have annual dental check to maintain healthy teeth and oral wellbeing
- Embedded health services; health nurse and other practitioners are now embedded in the Children in Care teams enabling better access to health services for children and young people
- Embedded clinical pathways to ensure all children and young people have access to mental health support. In 2020-21, we will develop this further through dedicated BICS clinicians sitting within Children in Care and CAMHS
- Maintained dedicated mental health provision for care leavers through Terapia (90 young people supported in 2019-20)
- Robust reviews of health assessments for all children. This also includes our unaccompanied minors in our care receiving thorough initial health assessments and access to mental health services
- All young people exiting care will continue to have a health passport detailing their health and well-being throughout childhood in support of their ongoing health needs continuing to be met
- That as many young people as possible access the gym and promote healthy living through. We will continue to promote the FAB card
- An environment where we encourage positive activity for all children in all they do, to improve their physical and mental health. We work with our partners, including Barnet Foster Carers Association (BAFCA), to support recreational activities and trips on weekends and during the holidays

Pledge 4: Staying Safe

We want every child in our care to be safe and secure.

We want to continue to achieve:

- Successful maintained and robust professional networks for all children to ensure holistic care planning that considers a collaborative approach to how we work together to keep young people safe
- Excellent consistent working relationships with our colleagues in Youth Offending, to continue to ensure that young people known to the criminal justice system have a collaborative plan. It is encouraging that very few of our children in care are involved in gang activity (2% of those currently in care have at some point in the last 5 years been involved in gang activity)
- Continuous improvement of our practice and how we intervene with young people, making consistent use of our robust internal systems to review interventions for children and young people, including those that are regularly missing or involved in Child Sexual Exploitation and Child Criminal Exploitation. 19% of our children in care are vulnerable adolescents; and 19% of children have had a missing episode in the last 12 months, with the majority offered and engaging in return home interviews to address means of disrupting this pattern of behaviour
- A strong emphasis on the voice of the child, where we promote it in practice and staff development, and where we learn from our young people, for example through working with young people and residential staff to embed learning from the Weapons workshop, and through expanding and promoting the Strengths and Resilience Group with the support of care experienced young people
- A flexible approach to interacting with our young people; ensuring that they can communicate with their social worker and personal advisor in a means that best suits them and communicates the message that their workers value them and prioritise their views to provide a feeling of security and stability; i.e. whatsapp, video calls, email, telephone and face to face visits
- Young people feeling secure when they transition into independent living. In 2019-20 we developed an offer for care leavers to support their successful transition to independent living through the Moving Forward project, where young people stay in shared accommodation with other young people and receive targeted support preparing them for independent living

Pledge 5: Championing Your Needs

We want to listen to young people's voices and take time to fully hear what the children in our care need, experience and are ambitious to achieve.

We want to continue to achieve:

- That all children and young people have an opportunity to attend Barnet Children in Care Council (BOP) and contribute their views to inform how we are working to best meet children and young people's needs
- A strong focus on embedding the dedicated All About Me assessment and plan to capture the narrative of a child's life journey
- Improvement of our advocacy service through implementing recommendations from recent advocacy service review report
- A recommissioned independent visitors and advocacy provision that affords our young people opportunities for support and encouragement of their wishes and feelings outside of the social work relationship
- A strong emphasis on the voice of the child whereby young people are involved in consultations activities for the council and other organisations, demonstrating our commitment to providing an excellent service informed by young people's experiences
- An effective contact centre where we ensure that children have access to positive and child focussed contact with their birth families



OUR CHILDREN IN CARE

The children in our care are unable to be cared for by their parents for a variety of reasons. In Barnet the majority of children come into our care as a result of abuse or neglect. On 4 April 2020, 38% of children were voluntarily accommodated under S20 of the Children Act 1989, 38% were subject to Care Orders and are in our care for the long term, and 22% children were subject to Interim Care Orders and their care arrangements remain to be determined by the Family Courts.

Using our resilience based approach all social work practice in our teams across Family Services place a strong emphasis on ensuring children remain with their birth family where practically possible and where it is safe to do so. In the last year (April 19 - March 20), Barnet Family Services entered into care proceedings in respect of 131 children. Of these 131 children, care proceedings were concluded with 63 children; the remaining 68 children's proceedings were not concluded in this reporting period. This is evident in the court proceedings outcome data for the 63 children whose proceedings concluded below:

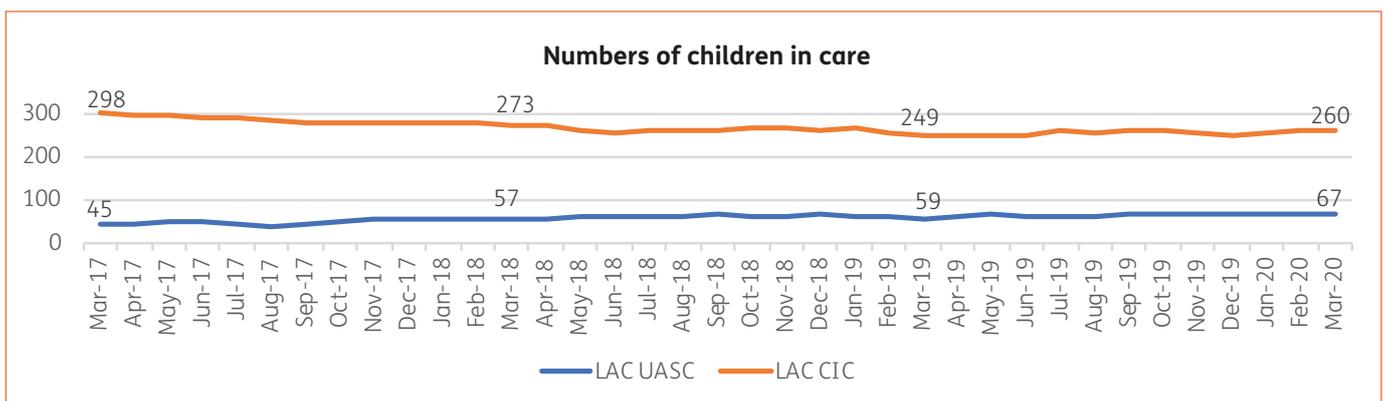
- 31 (49%) children achieved permanence through alternative care arrangements outside of the care of their birth parents.
 - o 18 of these children were placed with their wider families by virtue of Care Arrangement Orders and Special Guardianship Orders and
 - o 10 of these generally older children, became 'looked after' with a long term fostering plan.
 - o 3 children achieved plans for Adoption.
- 32 children remain or have returned home to their birth families and will remain subject to continued intervention and monitoring by Family Services interventions, however they are no longer children in care

During COVID we have not seen a rise in the issuing of care proceedings. There are currently 91 children subject to care proceedings. Between March 2020 - September 2020 Barnet issued care proceedings on 25 children, as compared to 54 children for the same period in 2019. There has however been a delay in the conclusion of some proceedings therefore it is likely that the average length of care proceedings



(currently 31 weeks for completed cases) will increase.

Barnet has stable figures of children coming into care. We had 327 children in our care on 31 March 2020 (33.7 per 10,000 children), in comparison to 312 children in care on 31 March 2019 (a rate of 32.2 per 10,000 children), and at a similar rate to 31 March 2018 (336; 34.7 per 10,000 children). Our rate of children in care is significantly lower than our statistical neighbours (45.2 in 2019). During the last few years, the number of unaccompanied asylum seekers (UASC) has slowly increased to just below the government benchmark of 68 UASC (0.07 of child population).



Below table summarises the profile of our children in care on 23 March 2020. It shows that the main cohorts are:

- Children with a family history of being on a child in need (CIN) plan or child protection plan (CP); neglect and abuse is the most common presenting factor.
- Children with special educational needs, e.g. those on ECHP plans – in the large majority of cases, this is in combination with CP/CIN history.

- Smaller cohort of young people that have history of going missing, child sexual exploitation (CSE), and/or for a small minority gang activity. Many of these young people have been through the Sexual Exploitation and Missing (SEAM) panel. Many of these young people also have history of being on CP/CIN plan.
- Unaccompanied asylum seekers

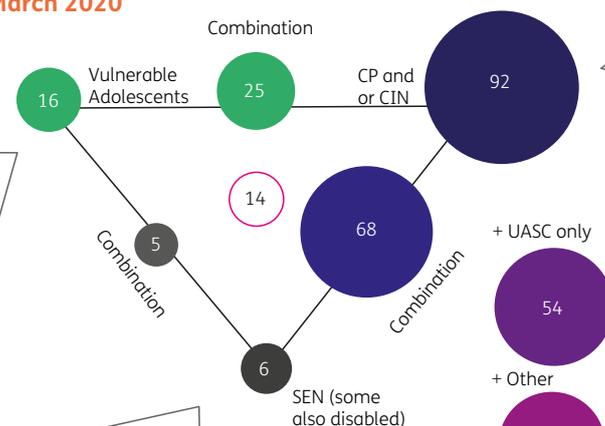
Summary profiling of our children in care

Snapshot of 322 children 23rd March 2020

Vulnerable adolescent is someone who is in the vulnerable adolescents profile during the last 5 years for a minimum of one reason e.g. CSE, gangs, SEAM, Missing. Young people with only indicator as missing 1-2 times have been excluded.

This applies to **19% of our CIC**, and can be in combination with other factors e.g. SEN, CP, CIN. This cohort:

- Has an **average age of 13**, 83% of this cohort came into care at 11 years or older.
- The current cohort has on average been in care for 3 years. This decreases to 1.8 years when excluding young people with CIN/CP/SEN.
- The majority are in **residential (37%) or in semi-independent (35%)**. Only 22% are in foster care; their average age of coming into care is lower at 10.



Special Education Needs represents 25% of children in care, or 23% when excluding vulnerable adolescents. The large majority have past CIN/CP history.

- The average age they came into care is 7 years old. Only 15% were 11 years or older.
- This cohort is more likely to be spend more time in care; average for current cohort is 4.5 years.
- **68% are in foster care, with 27% in residential.**

62% CIC have past history of CIN/CP.

29% have only past history of CIN/CP. This cohort:

- Came in to care young (average 6 years old; 83% 10 years or younger)
- On average the current cohort has been in care for 2 years.
- **83% are in foster care, with some placed for adoption.**

61 CIC are UASC, some of these young people are also for example vulnerable and are included in the other cohorts.

17% (54) have UASC as their key indicator. This cohort:

- Came into care as teenagers (average age 15; 96% were 11 years or older)
- On average, the current cohort has been in care 1.5 years.
- Are in foster care (63%) or in semi-independent (33%)

In comparison to other children in care, UASC are more likely to be male (90% 31 March 2020) and to come into care when they are older (40% were 16+ 31 March 2020).

Children in Care (31st of March 2020)		CIC	UASC	Total
Gender	Female	49%	10%	41%
	Male	51%	90%	59%
Ethnicity	Any Other Ethnic Group	4%	63%	16%
	Asian	4%	21%	7%
	Black	18%	6%	16%
	Gypsy/Roma	0%	0%	0%
	Mixed	26%	0%	21%
	White	46%	6%	38%
	Not Stated	1%	4%	2%
Age started care	0-10	67%	3%	54%
	11 to 13	13%	25%	16%
	14 - 15	12%	31%	16%
	16 - 17	7%	40%	14%
Total	260	67	327	

OUR CHILDREN IN CARE

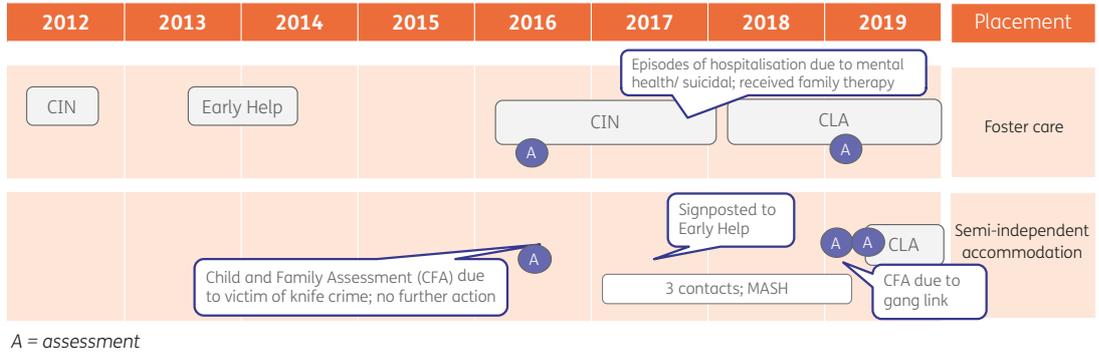
For our general population of children coming into care, there has been a decrease in children coming into care when they are 16+, down to only 7% (31 March 2020). Young people that come into care when they are older tend to become looked after due to complex reasons, from escalating mental health concerns, to family breakdown. Needs tend

to be young person centred, with mental health often an underlying issue, in many cases there have been missing episodes, and some substance misuse, and in some cases child sexual exploitation. Below graph shows two example journeys for children coming into care when they are 16+.

Two young people coming into care aged 16+

Parental mental health is affecting family. Young person has mental health issues, including self harm, and has missing episodes

Young person with link to gangs; drug misuse; risk of homelessness



Our Placements Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy 2019-2023 sets out our approach for how we will deliver a placement offer that secures sufficient accommodation for children that do come into our care as well as those leaving care (please see also next section). We have a strong foundation; with excellent placement practice and a diverse offer of suitable accommodation. Placements and pathways are planned for each child and young person, in an approach that ensures that our placements are child and young person centred, suitable and meet safeguarding concerns and needs. During 2019-20 we have further analysed our needs and set out practical steps for how we will develop our placements offer to meet the needs our children and young people. The primary focus is on development of our in-house foster carer and supported lodgings offer (were 16+ young people live with a supportive host), but we are also building a new residential children’s home at Woodside Avenue. This home will focus on therapeutic support for our most vulnerable teenagers that need wrap-around support and counselling.

Placement (31 March 2020)	No.	%
Internal		
LBB Fostering	87	27%
Kinship Fostering	27	8%
Placed for Adoption	15	5%
Internal Residential	11	3%
Parents	7	2%
Total internal	147	45%
External		
Independent Fostering Agency	93	28%
Semi Independent	48	15%
External Residential	34	10%
NHS	3	1%
Remand	1	0.30%
Secure Unit	1	0.30%
Total external	180	55%
Grand Total	327	100%



Our placement demand transformation is underpinned by developing our in-house offer for foster carers and supported lodgings hosts. Foster care is our preferred placement option, with the majority of our children in care placed in foster care (63%, 207 children). Where applicable, kinship foster care is considered, with 11% (24) of our children in foster care placed with other family members or relatives. If this is not an option, children are primarily placed with LBB foster carers; Barnet has 102 foster carers, and 87 (27%) children are placed with them.

In Barnet there is on-going recruitment of foster carers, from local newspaper advertisements, to posters and out-reach to local community groups. In 2019-20 we have been developing our strategy with the goal to have a long-term recruitment strategy that provides an effective, aspirational, high quality campaign at best value, to meet the needs of children in care of the London Borough of Barnet.

Ofsted said...

“The quality of services for children in care has improved since the inspection in 2017. Social workers and managers are aspirational for the children in their care and demonstrate a determination to improve children’s experiences and outcomes.”

“When children come into care, they receive effective and sensitive intervention. This includes unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, who receive a strong, supportive and quick response to meet their needs.”

Case study

Rakim*, travelled from his home in Middle East and arrived in the UK as an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child who was trafficked into the UK. He has been living with his foster carers since coming to the UK, enabling him to develop a trusting, caring and supportive relationship with carers who promote his well-being and advocate for his needs. Rakim will remain with his carers under a Staying Put arrangement enabling him to continue to feel settled in the only home environment he has known in the UK.

*name and details changed

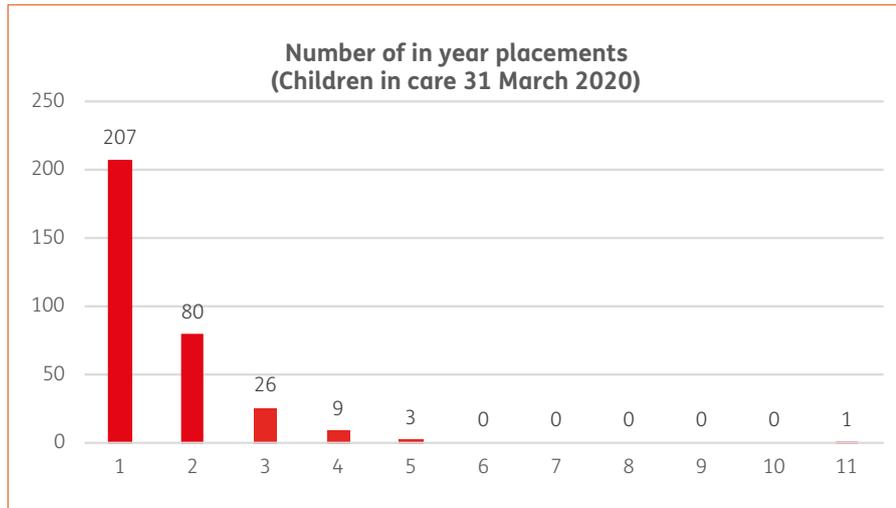


Our aim is to:

- Replace our current foster carers as they retire or resign from the service. 36% (39) of our foster carers are 60 years old or older.
- Increase the number of in-house foster carers (+20 over next 2 financial years) and therefore reduce the number of children placed within Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA). This will enable more of our young people to stay locally.
- Increase the number of supported lodgings hosts (+20 over the next 2 financial years). This will create another placement option for 16+ young people; UASC will be one of our main target groups. This will ensure that UASC can remain with one host throughout their time in care, supporting their integration into society.
- To meet the needs of children with complex needs, we aim to also target recruitment at people with a background in relevant professions, such as police officers, social workers, nurses and teachers. This has the potential to offer family based options for our emotionally complex children and be a step-down option from residential placements.
- Develop a respite option for carers that will enable our carers to manage the demands of our most complex young people.

Following Ofsted, Barnet focused on pathway planning and careful matching. This gave results and overall placement stability in the short and long term improved good placement stability in 2018-19, with aligned figures in 2019-20. 39 children and young people had 3 or more placements in 2019-20 (37 in 2018-20). Placement moves are undertaken in order to ensure a young person’s needs are best met and they are safeguarded effectively. Older young people are more likely to experience 3 or more placements, as their needs change in adolescence, or because of a safeguarding issue due to being at risk of exploitation.

OUR CHILDREN IN CARE



COVID-19 Placement stability has remained good over the weeks of lockdown with 302 of our children having only 1 placement. Foster families and children have shown great resilience and we have seen relationships improving, behaviours more settled and some children, who have previously found the school environment challenging, are accessing learning more constructively.



During 2019-20 the number of care leavers continued to increase month on month. Since January 2020 the numbers of care leavers have stabilised. On 31 March 2020 Barnet had 323 care leavers, 105 who were UASC. Most of our care leavers are 18-20-year olds (238; 74%) with 12% (39) 21 years old and only 14% (46) 22 years or older.

Ofsted said...

“Care leavers are in suitable accommodation, and there is good use of staying put arrangements, including for young adults in their twenties.”

Case study

Robin* came into care as a young child. They have lived with their foster carers for most of their childhood, and currently remain living with them under a Staying Put arrangement while they attend college. They return home to their foster family during holidays and consider them to be part of their family and includes them in their list of favourite people.

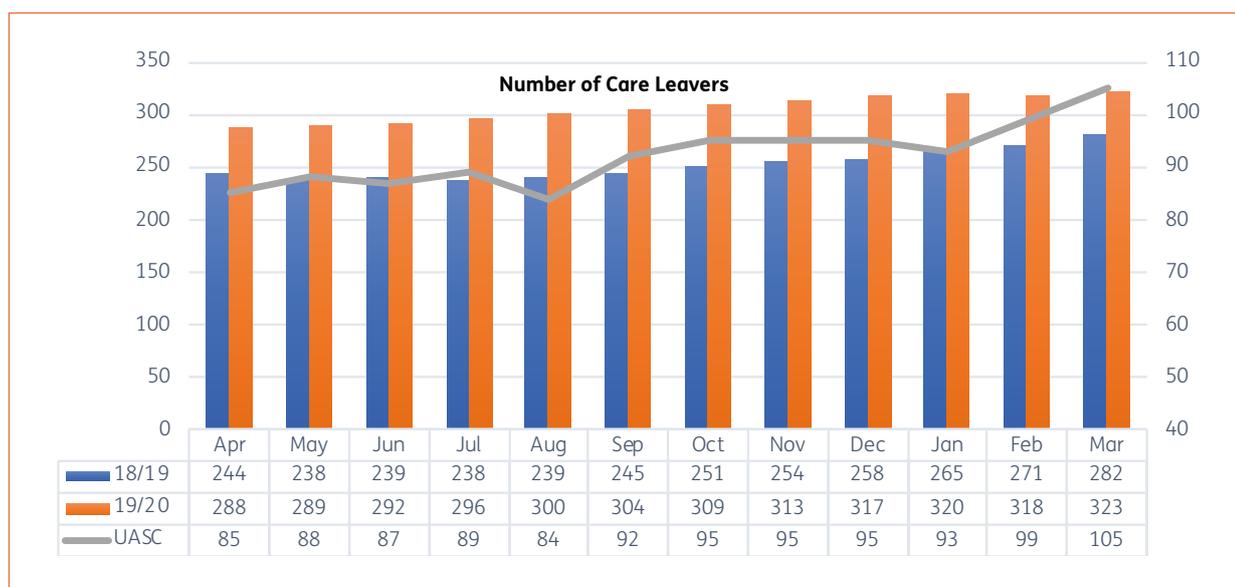
*name and details changed

While most provision provides adequate support, some of our young people have fed back that some providers were not preparing them sufficiently for the future. In 2019-20 we have been reviewing our provision and been developing alternative accommodation offers for young people. This will be fully implemented throughout 2020-21 and 2021-22.

More than half of all care leavers now live independently (59%), up from 43% in March 2018. These young people continue to receive support from their personal adviser. We are also introducing floating support offer on a needs basis for the minority of our young people that may need additional support during a limited time, for example when they first move into their property or for additional support to ensure that they can remain within their tenancy.

Some young people remain in their children in care placement post-18 prior to moving to independent accommodation. Almost all care leavers are living in suitable accommodation (99%). Staying put has been implemented with 34 (11%) of care leavers remaining with their former foster carer. We are also introducing supported lodgings for young people that are 16-21, which will provide similar support to a staying put arrangement. This is a good option for asylum seekers; many present when they are 16+ (40%) and this is an opportunity for them to remain with the same host throughout their period in care and as care leavers.

Semi-independent accommodation has been our main offer of transitional accommodation for 16+ year olds. Now only 11% (37) care leavers live in semi-independent accommodation, down from 18% in March 2019. Some children return home but most move to their own accommodation at around 18 years. To ensure a successful transition into independent living, some young people may need to stay in semi-independent post-18. In 2019-20 we developed an offer for these young people through our Moving Forward project, where young people stay in shared accommodation with other young people and receive targeted support preparing them for independent living. We are now piloting it at a 4-bed property in West Hendon.



During the lockdown, we ensured that young people turning 18 could remain at their current placement until it was safe to move onto their own independent accommodation or alternative arrangements. Lockdown can be an isolating experience; we supported our young people throughout the lockdown through our personal advisers and key workers completing both virtual and face to face visits, but also through creating online activities. We also worked with Barnet’s Live Unlimited Charity to provide dongles and tablets/laptops for care leavers, ensuring that they could remain connected with their families and the wider world through the Internet.

The percentage of care leavers that are EET remained consistent at over 60% for most of the year but has subsequently dipped to 54% in March 2020. COVID-19 is also an economic crisis. Recessions tend to have a disproportionate impact on young people that are starting out and it is crucial that we focus on this area as we move to restarting the economy in the UK. Barnet are funding a Care Leavers Project through our 16+ service within Family Services, with multiple projects focusing on enabling care leavers to move into education, employment and training opportunities (EET). The project started in September 2018 and thus far (until August 2020), 25 Care leavers moved into EET directly due to the Care Leavers Project initiative, and out of the original cohort of 87 young people, 70 are now EET. The programme has delivered the following key outcomes in 2019-20:

- 20 care leavers have completed the Bridging the Gap programme since April 2019. It is a bespoke training, personalised learning, personal development and employability programme targeted at young people who have experienced significant trauma.
- The programme has assisted in arranging a number of apprenticeships, including 10 young people commencing Street Scene traineeships in November 2018, 8 of whom completed these in May 2019. Since May 2019, 5 young people have been through our new 'Routes into Construction' Traineeship. 10 young people have enrolled on the Skills Training Traineeship Scheme, out of which 5 have completed their training and are moving through to employment.
- Mentoring and job coaching. The young people have stated that mentoring has helped them with housing, mental wellbeing and financial budgeting. Mentoring is therefore being explored for all future care leavers and to date is working extremely well.
- 20 care leavers received the Money Management skills training through MyBnk. The courses have proved popular with young people, and further funding is being explored to make the accredited course available to all care leavers.

Ofsted said...

“The majority of care leavers are in education, employment or training and there is a good focus on engaging young people in such activities by their personal advisers. Senior managers have been proactive in developing opportunities for care leavers through the creation of a number of apprenticeships. Personal advisers are proactive and genuinely interested in the young people, who value the support that they receive.”

Case study

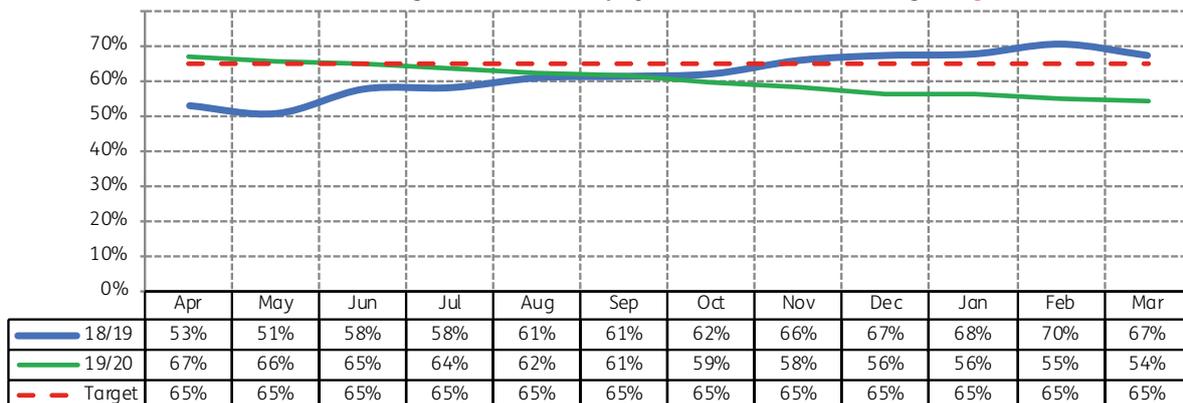
Gloria*, became looked after as a teenager following experiencing poor mental health. Gloria continues to turn to her personal advisor in times of difficulty and stress.

As a young adult, Gloria experienced an episode of poor mental health. During this time, she reached out to her PA in crisis asking for help, who responded by driving over the Bank Holiday weekend to collect Gloria and bring her back, linking her in with relevant mental health team and support.

Gloria has now completed her degree and is working part time. She continues to drop-in to WHR and contacts her PA regularly for support and guidance.

*name and details changed

Care Leavers (aged 19,20,21) in Employment, Education or Training - Target 65%





Our relationships with the children in our care and care leavers is key to our practice. Social workers and personal advisers keep in contact with our children and young people, undertaking regular visits and more recently catching up through virtual means. The 2019 Children in Care Survey reported that 84% of children see their social worker frequently enough, and that 98% of children feel involved in decisions that impact their lives.

Ofsted said...

“Staff are tenacious and determined in working with young people to improve outcomes, which they do with care and sensitivity.”

“Most care leavers receive a positive level of support. The quality of pathway plans is variable and not all pathway plans are reviewed when young people’s circumstances significantly change. Better pathway plans were seen using the recently launched ‘All about me’ format, which contains greater clarity about young people’s views and aspirations and a more thorough assessment of their circumstances.”

Case study

The lockdown has also been an opportunity for us as Corporate Parents to engage with our children in care in different ways. With the support from foster carers and social workers, our children in care enjoyed being creative during lockdown. They learned new songs, created time capsules, painted portraits and took creative pictures of their daily lives.

The ‘All About Me’ assessment and planning tool, introduced across the service in 2018/19, is our main tool for recording the views of the young person, their relationships and any care planning decisions made. The ‘All about me’ process centres on young people talking about their lived experience, and has been developed to enable the plan to become an evolving life story tool to support young people in understanding and contextualising their own biographies. All about me was highlighted in May 2019 ILACS inspection as having improved pathway planning with greater clarity about young people’s views and aspirations and a more thorough assessment of their circumstances. In 2019-20 we continued to see the impact, with nuanced and considered care planning now demonstrated in the All About Me reviews and tracking panel. The All About me review and plan process has enabled children and young people to lead their own plans and actively engage in decision making about their future. A number of young people have fed back to their social workers that they enjoy engaging in their ongoing assessment and some children and young people have used their creativity with music/art/drawing to bring their All About Me Plan to life.

MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

We have also strengthened our relationships and pathway planning through bringing in the Personal Advisers earlier during the young person's transition planning to 18. We have developed a system where young people are allocated to a leaving care pod made up of personal advisors, one social worker and a deputy team manager, just after their 17th birthday. They will then be allocated a personal advisor at 17.5 months who will work alongside the child's allocated social worker until they transition to leaving care services on or just after their 18th birthday.

At the start of the pandemic, the service rapidly changed routines and adopted new ways of working. Creative ways of connecting with children and young people and supporting carers has meant that the majority of children remain stable in their care arrangements. Visits to children in care have primarily been undertaken through virtual means, in combination of WhatsApp, Skype and facetime. Where children have needed direct social work intervention to support them during the lockdown and assist with placement stability, doorstep and garden visits have taken place. Completed audits during the lockdown evidenced good and outstanding domains regarding the child's voice and engagement, highlighting the effectiveness of the methods and suggesting that social workers are listening to our children and exploring their views. Children and young people have overall benefited from the flexible, virtual approach, with many children and young people feeding back that they have really enjoyed doing virtual activities with their workers such as joint cook along and baking sessions, and playing musical instruments together over skype or whatsapp.

Some young people seem to have been positively impacted by the lockdown, and seem to now be more settled in their placements. This may be because they have less family

contact or they feel secure having so many boundaries in place. Some children have expressed that they would rather continue communicating via phone/video than have visits. In some circumstances, phone contact/visits are less imposing and cause less disturbance on daily life. As we are moving into 2020-21, we are considering how we will listen to these wishes and ensure they inform our future ways of working. There are also indications that our young people are starting to find the constraints of lockdown very difficult and there is a level of instability creeping into some placements where carers are fatigued and children are pushing against the boundaries. Moving forward the expectation is to combine virtual and face to face visits as it suits the child and their care arrangement's individual needs.

Children's contacts with their birth families and other relatives is also important to their well-being. Children in care have continued to have contact with their birth family and those important to them in ways that individually meet their needs. Children who remain subject to care proceedings are provided with quality contact with their parents and siblings most often at our contact centre, with sessions that are tailored around their individual needs of timing and frequency. For children and young people who are in the care of the local authority under final care orders, contact with their birth family, and people important to them, is formulated through a unique care plan informed by their wishes of who they want to maintain significant relationships with. Contact arrangements for all children is regularly reviewed as part of their All About Me Children in Care reviews and is informed by the child's individual needs of timing, venue and frequency and with the individuals the child considers important to them.



2019 – 2020 has been a year of change and challenge for everyone and this is also true of the Virtual School. Back in September 2019, the academic year started without a Head Teacher for the Virtual School. Under the Executive Headteacher’s leadership, senior case workers took on additional responsibilities and ably managed a difficult period, ensuring caseworkers were able to support the young people on their caseloads and stabilising the team. A new headteacher was appointed and took up the full-time role on 20 April 2020.

Ofsted said...

“The virtual school provides effective support for the progress and attainment of children in care. The virtual school team has a sound understanding of the progress that children are making. As a result of effective support, many make good progress from their starting points. Personal education plans are mostly of good quality; they are reviewed termly and clearly identify the support that children need. Interventions are tailored to children’s needs and support their progress well.”

Virtual school case study

Iris* is a teenager, and prior to coming into care, she had been home schooled. Her virtual school caseworker pro-actively ensured Iris was linked in with the transitions hub providing her with an outreach mentor to support her introduction to a more formal education style and school life. The case worker advocated for the right school for Iris to best meet her needs and alongside the outreach mentor maintained support throughout her shift from the transition hub to mainstream school. Her outreach worker continued to support Iris’ when she returned to mainstream school.

*name and details changed

Over the year, the Virtual School instigated changes to ensure systems were as efficient as possible including a new register database and an overhaul of the finance and tracking systems. Positive links between Family Services and Virtual School were forged enabling effective working and the Virtual School has been represented at Permanency Planning Panel, Permanency Tracking Panel, VARP and Strategic MACE. The Virtual School has also attended the Pupil Placement Panel to work with education partners to address difficulties around hard to place children and made links with the school nursing team for Looked After Children. Links with schools have been supported by the introduction of a termly newsletter for Designated Teachers as well a continuation of training. A weekly Education Panel has been established to manage the allocation of caseworkers to young people who are new to our care, make decisions around the allocation of funding and track any young people needing statutory education who are without a school place.



The Virtual School has also provided enrichment opportunities for young people, many supported by the John Lyons Charity. Despite the challenges of lockdown, these have carried on, albeit in different forms. For example, this summer we had two young people who took part in a University Taster 4-Day Summer Course in conjunction with the Harrow School and 3 young people who took up the opportunity to join a STEM 5-Day Summer Course. This is an online course to build on a range of life and employment skills and raise aspirations for attending University, whilst promoting an interest in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM). Through this they also earn a Bronze Crest Award, a nationally recognised scheme for student-led project work in STEM, which looks great on University applications.

Data for the end of 2019 showed some very positive outcomes. Highlights include:

- End of Key Stage 2 - where there is ranking data, Barnet is in the top 10% of LAs for progress in reading, writing and maths and first for progress in Maths
- For GCSEs, Barnet is in the top 10% for progress
- Barnet had a lower rate of fixed term exclusions for children in care compared with the similar group nationally
- 29% of care leavers were not in education, employment and training compared with 39% nationally

- 8% of care leavers went onto higher education compared with 6% nationally e.g. we had one young person who went to Queen Mary University to read Biomaterials for Biomedical Sciences and one who went to Norwich University to study Animation

In March 2020, COVID 19 had hit and the resilience and professionalism of the team really shone through. The team's focus was to ensure support was in place for young people as well as to reduce the burden on Designated Teachers and Social Workers. Some of the actions put in place were:

- tuition /or for all children for two hours a week for four weeks to bridge the gap as schools got their online learning up and running and some children returned to school.
- a new COVID-19 specific PEP was implemented
- caseworkers led on PEPs and attended every PEP virtually, even managing to cover an additional 65 children due to one member of staff being on long term sick with COVID-19.
- 50 laptops were distributed to children with no/limited access in advance of the DfE scheme
- a newsletter was sent out to Designated Teachers and a training session held with a focus on children in care and why the COVID-19 situation might have been particularly challenging for them

Another development was that Barnet Virtual School, in collaboration with Achieving for Children's Virtual School (Kingston, Richmond, Windsor and Maidenhead) and St Mary's University, were awarded a £750,000 research grant, for two years, by the Youth Endowment Foundation for a feasibility study to implement a Transition Hub for children in care aged 11 to 14. This is hosted at Whitefield's Secondary School and is being led by Neil Marlow. The project is to support young people who are new to care and children in care experiencing a transition in home/school placement within the care system. The service emphasises a school/ carer/student ready approach to ensure all parties working directly with the child are empowered and assisted in ensuring the best possible outcomes for the child. It is an exciting project to be involved in and we look forward to seeing the impact as the project develops.

As we move into a new academic year in uncertain times, there will be a need to continue to adapt and change but it is also an exciting time for the Virtual School where we can build on the successes of the year. We have a stable team with strong shared aspirations for the Virtual School. We have some clear areas we want to develop including how we monitor and support the attendance of our young people, how we gather children's views and how we can further our links with Family Services. The year has ended with challenging times for everyone, but for many of our young children in care, both the last few months and the next few to come, are likely to be particularly difficult. A key focus for the team will be encouraging them back into education and working with schools to ensure the new academic year starts as smoothly as possible to enable our children in care to make the maximum progress possible.



2019 Children in Care Survey reported that 85% of children in care sometimes/frequently feel down or upset about things. When asked about support they get, almost all respondents knew about at least one of the support options listed. Children are more likely to be aware of, and use, institutional settings such as doctors and hospitals, with more than half of all respondents (53%) having used their doctor for support.

Ofsted said...

“Children’s physical and emotional health needs are well understood and met. Health assessments are up to date and timely and address known health histories. They identify all health needs and are actively followed up to ensure that these needs are met. Strengths and difficulties questionnaires inform assessments of children’s emotional health, with additional support available from relevant clinicians and in-house specialists to enable carers to care for children with complex needs and histories.”

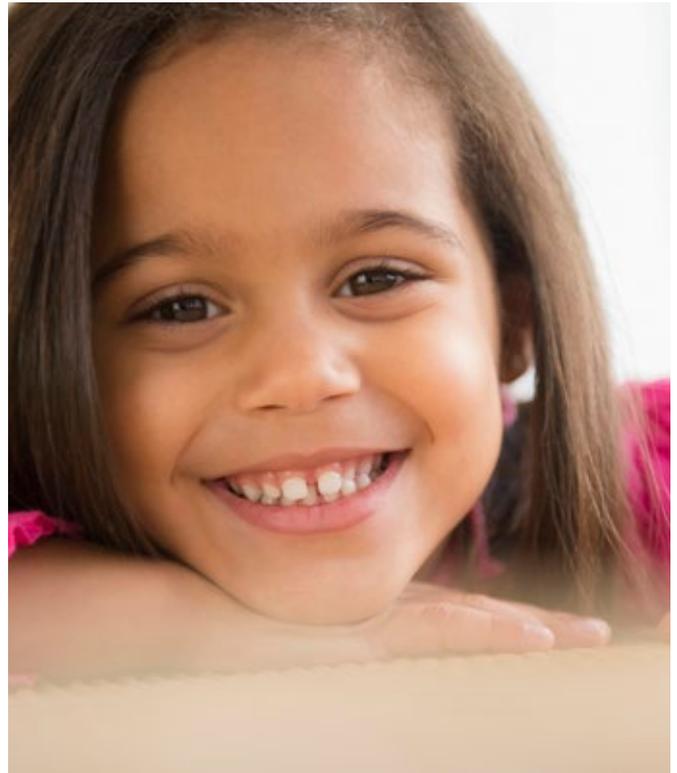
Case study

Karim* is now a teenager and has been in care since he was a child and has experienced multiple moves with different carers. He has a number of complex needs and has struggled with his care arrangements, despite considerable support being provided to both Karim and his carer. He is currently receiving 1:1 therapy with a BICS clinician providing him the opportunity to talk about his feelings and emotions in order to support Karim’s understanding of why he is in care and his early traumatic childhood experiences. The clinician also provides sessions to Karim’s foster carer and Karim’s birth parent, providing both adults with tools and techniques to best support Karim during his behaviour difficulties and to provide them with a space to discuss their feelings and emotional responses to Karim’s complex needs.

*name and details changed

It is encouraging that 60% of respondents have either used, or are aware of Barnet’s online counselling service, Kooth. The service was introduced in 2018-19 and has been fully embedded in 2019-20. It has been well received by our children and young people, with 92% of users recommending the service (end of session feedback from 93 individuals). In 2019-20, Kooth chatted with 504 young people, and messaged with 1,607 young people. Anxiety and stress was the most common presenting issue. Young people also accessed articles (3,501 views) and forums (7,826 views) on a range of mental health and wellbeing topics.

For in-person and more comprehensive support, Barnet Integrated Clinical Service (BICS) offer social, emotional, behavioural and mild to moderate mental health support to children, young people and families within Barnet, including



in-house clinical service to children and young people known to the wider Barnet Family Service. BICS work within a stepped care model of delivering a range of therapeutic interventions working closely with NHS specialist CAMHS and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector. In 2019-20 the service also developed a series of free summer and autumn workshops for children, young people, parents/carers and professionals. In response to the lockdown, BICS introduced a new podcast series to support children and carers’ well-being. These free podcasts cover a variety of themes and helpful psychological strategies that can be used whilst moving out of lockdown. In 2020-21, BICS clinicians will be embedded within Children’s Social Care, with the new Clinical Manager developing the vision for Children Social care clinicians going forward.

Furthermore, 1:1 counselling support is offered through Terapia to our care leavers (16-25-year olds), with 90 young people supported in 2019-20. This helps care leavers that have been through trauma, and challenging situations such as moving through different placements, supporting them to overcome some of their anxieties, building their self-esteem and confidence. At Rephael House, 65 children and young people were supported in 2019-20. At the house, those aged 4-12 years are offered play therapy, and 13-19 years receive age appropriate 1:1 counselling. Children and young people receive targeted support for 12 weeks, on issues ranging from parental separation/ divorce, to anxiety and school, college or work issues. In 2019-20, children and young people have seen improvement in their wellbeing (average 32%), symptoms (average 37%), and most importantly in risk management (average 48%).

We are a UNICEF Child's Rights Partner, a programme which embeds the child's voice across the partnership. This programme facilitated the participation of young people in the development of our Children and Young People's Plan, in which more than 1500 young people were engaged. Our children and young people also engage and participate in groups discussions, questionnaires, individual conversations and consultations. A larger group of young people also engage through art based projects and fun day activities.

Ofsted said...

"Young people's views are sought and their involvement in shaping services is sensitively facilitated."

"Children are actively encouraged to take part in their reviews, although the number of children accessing advocacy is low and more needs to be done to promote the service."

Case studies of impact

When the Head of Service attended #BOP in February 2020, young people shared they wanted more support from the Local Authority to assist with work experience. This has informed CPOG planning to develop an inventory of organisations to assist with work experience opportunities for young people in 2021.

The young people of #BOP also informed the Head of Service that they were tired of retelling 'their story' in the changes of social workers. This resulted in Barnet's commitment to develop the 'say it once' pledge in collaboration with young people, with a policy in development to inform service delivery for 2020- 2021.

There is an active #BOP Barnet on Point Child in Care Council who have led the organisation of three annual celebration events for different cohorts of children in care/ care leavers and a Youth Assembly, which provides young people with the opportunity to have their voices heard and to enable them to bring forward motions to be presented at the Children, Education and Safeguarding committee. Examples of impact on decision-making within the local authority included enforcing and redesigning the Pledge, consulting with Public Health and helped shape and design services around mental health in schools.

Throughout 2019-20, #BOP Barnet on Point has taken part in many consultations in addition to planning and designing several sessions and projects:

- #BOP Children in Care Council members participate in Skills to Foster training where they voice their experiences and needs in care and advise new foster carers how to foster good relationships with them. This will continue to be a focus for 2020-21, with #BOP also involved in foster carer and social worker recruitment.

- #BOP members engage in consultations with senior management and have their say on new policies, pledges, survey etc. In 2020-21, #BOP will continue to participate in consultations on issues that directly affect children in care such as housing, education, mental health, advocacy services, apprenticeships etc.
- The chair of the Children in Care Council has been elected Barnet's Youth Ambassador and it offers a great opportunity to children in care to directly influence policies and have a voice in key decisions that affect their lives.
- Through the project 'Upskill BOP' #BOP members learned new skills such as; softs skills, digital literacy, and critical thinking.

When young people in care were asked what BOP had done for them, responses included; built new friendships, took part in fun and positive activities, offered support and information, education and work experience advice, a place where their voices are heard and valued.

The Strengths & Resilience Group (S&R Group) is a group for children in care leavers. It started in March 2019 and is led by a care leaver and an Onwards and Upwards Social Worker. There are approximately 20 young people who regularly attend, and on average 4-5 young adults will attend each session. The aim of the group is to facilitate creative and fun ways of promoting and celebrating individual strengths of children in care and care leavers. As a group we consider life stories through creative exercises including art, activities, music and drama. A range of themes were explored, from dreams and aspirations to emotions and self-care. The group brings together young people that could learn from each other and provide a safe space for creative expression about their experiences with a view to improving emotional health and wellbeing, whilst also improving transition from child in care to leaving care. It also offers an opportunity for the young people to familiarise themselves with the services at Woodhouse Road, our care leavers hub. For example, in August 2019 we had a table at the summer BBQ with art activities around raising aspiration and this was very popular with young people producing some lovely canvases.

Based on our initial observations of what works, in 2020-21 Strengths & Resilience Group will focus on online activities with targeted work and specific subjects will be explored. The group is exploring options for targeted online forums; these will provide a network and a way to be in contact through COVID-19 lockdown and provide an opportunity for young people to support each other. The main forum will particularly look at wellbeing and the impact of COVID-19, with smaller focused online groups exploring specific subjects, from asylum to preparing for independence. Plans are also in place to provide targeted support to a group of Vietnamese female children in care.

The Ofsted inspection in May 2020 noted that usage of advocacy is low. In 2019-20, a number of activities were undertaken to improve the awareness of the service, as well as to review it, including consulting with children and young people as well as key staff. All young people who took part in the review shared they value the service and feel their advocate supports them to resolve issues and understand their needs. Advocates are seen as the young people's first port of call and an invaluable service, who go above and beyond. One young person commented: "My advocate has helped me with confidence and given me hope". We have begun to see an increase in usage of the service, and in 2020-21, we will use the results from the review to develop our approach further. Key areas include strengthening relationships between Barnet staff and the Advocacy service, for example through drop-in sessions at Woodhouse Road and better recording, as well raising awareness among children that are on child protection plans.



