

# CORPORATE PARENTING ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024



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## Foreword

*Brigitte Jordaan – Director of Corporate Parenting and Disability*

## Introduction

Throughout 2023/2024 we continued to implement and deliver service to ensure children and young adults felt supported and encouraged to dream their dreams and live their lives safely and positively. As a service we efficiently and effectively continued with our model of hybrid working ensuring direct working with children, families, and professionals when considered to be in the child's best interest, while offering the flexibility of remote working when a creative approach was needed.

Our corporate parenting strategy 2021 -2023 delivers 6 pledges to our children and care experienced young adults whereby we will:

- Support them to fulfil their dreams;
- Be there for them, when they need us;
- Support their mental and physical health;
- Listen, communicate and make decisions together with them;
- Support them to become independent and prepare for adulthood;
- Celebrate them, their achievements, identity and culture.

Our strategy focuses on resilience, aspirations and independence as children move from care into adulthood. We want the same things for children and young people in our care as any good parent would want for their child. We want our children to be resilient – by that we want them to have a health and happy childhood, to feel valued and loved, and to have the chance to grow, develop and learn so that they can find their way in the world as an adult.

In November – December 2023 we commissioned Coram Voice in partnership with the Rees Foundation to undertake a further Bright Spots survey with our children in care and care experienced young adults. 147 children (49%) and 159 (50%) of care experienced adults completed the survey, sharing their views about how they felt about their lives. This is a follow-up to the initial survey completed in May – June 2021, and evidenced a much stronger response from our care experienced young people, up from 33%. The initial survey *Your Life, Your Care*, awarded 5 Bright Spots of Practice:

- Trusting social workers
- Liking school / college
- Access to nature
- Knowing identity of their social worker and
- Low numbers of overall low well-being.

The same 5 Bright Spots of practice were awarded this year, along with 11 new Bright Spots:

- Remaining in on placement since entering care
- Life skills

- Support for learning
- Not feeling afraid of going to school because of bullying
- Feeling the adults you live with notice how you feel
- Talking to cares about things that matter to you
- Support with worries
- Happiness with appearance
- Life satisfaction
- Feeling the things you do are worthwhile, and
- Feeling positive about your future.

For our care experienced young adults aged 18 and over, the survey Your Life Beyond Care initially recognised feeling positive about your future as a Bright Spot of practice in 2021. Unfortunately this Bright Spot was not awarded in the recent survey, however 4 new Bright Spots of practice were identified:

- Feeling my home is right for me
- Having a smart phone
- Feeling proud
- Not feeling angry

The Your Life Beyond Care survey also identified a significant improvement since 2021, whereby young people's anxiety had decreased from 33% to 26%. However, the survey also indicated areas that had not improved for care experienced young people, including:

- Being able to connect to the internet where they live from 82% to 73%
- Feeling positive about the future, from 92% to 81%.

Children, young people and care experienced adults' views and the results of the survey will be reviewed and incorporated into our revised Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024 – 2027.

During their June 2021 inspection Ofsted highlighted two areas of social work practice that need to improve:

- Case recording, including the recording of supervision, visits and direct work with children and the rationale for decision-making on placements.
- The completion and quality of 'All About Me' plans.

In response to these recommendations, we have continued our audit workstream continue identify examples of good practice and highlight where improvement is needed. Team managers and auditors have worked alongside practitioners to ensure that information from the audits inform practice, and the case files effectively represent the excellent practice that teams are producing. 73% of audits were graded good or outstanding across the year. Quarterly reports continue to show ongoing improvements and evidence that the audit actions are being used in supervision to reflect on practice and implement positive change for children, young people and young adults. A decreasing number of audits graded as requiring improvement indicate that management oversight remains an area of challenge, along with how a child's identity and diversity is captured and reflected across the file. Working with children and young people to help them understand and celebrate their individual identity and diversity remains a key priority across family services.

For all children and young people in care, the 'All About Me' assessment and plan continues to be an essential piece of direct work and planning that social workers complete with the child and young person. Our continued practice of dip sampling evidences that the quality of these plans is mostly good, are child focussed and written from the child's perspective. Consistency and ensuring all plans and actions for a child are aligned would strengthen practice.

Placement stability continues to improve and since April 2023, 219 (up from 194) children and young people have remained in their homes; 88 children (an increase of 8) have had 2 placements, and 33 young people have had 3 or more placements down from 35 in 2022/2023. The continued lower number of multiple placement moves is a result of intensive work to understand the needs of the child, supporting carers with comprehensive packages including clinical support and working closely with external providers to ensure good quality of care. Some of these young people have moved addresses with the same provider or in the case of infants have moved from the hospital to a parent assessment unit to either foster care or home with parent. These moves are often planned and in line with the permanency planning for a child.

## Progress against the 6 key pledges within the Corporate Parenting Strategy

### We will support you to fulfil your dreams

According to the Bright Spots survey, majority of the children liked school, with 85% of children aged 4-7 and 84% of children aged 11-17 liking school 'a lot' or 'a bit', a significantly larger proportion compared to other looked after children (74%). Children and young people liking school is a Bright Spot of practice in Barnet.

#### Throughout 2023/24 we have:

- Continued with our provision of a virtual school that is dedicated to helping children and young people get the best from their educational experience in order for them to have exciting choices later in life. We remain committed to providing additional educational support and a variety of enrichment activities and ensured all children have access to a laptop or tablet
- Progressed our 18-25 NEET to EET panel as part of the Care Experienced EET project and enhanced our offer of dedicated EET support to 16 and 17 year olds.
- Developed a horticulture programme for care experienced young people at our leaving care hub. This bespoke 12-week programme for UASC/former UASC young people to gain skills in horticulture, as a pathway to employment with 13 young people attending.
- Continued to provide the onsite English as a Second Language (ESOL) provision delivered at the Leaving Care Centre attended by 12 young people throughout the year, 80% of whom successfully continued learning through enrolling in college.
- Bridging the Gap and Thrive programs have continued to run throughout the 2023/2024; 49 young people accessed employment, 25 of whom remained in employment after 3 months and 41 young people resume education.
- BELS and BOOST colleagues collaborated in the delivery of a construction day at Woodhouse Road attended by 8 young people, with 5 young people later accessing employment.

- BELS and Centrepont delivered a week-long construction course
- With our charity Live Unlimited, we have supported 39 young people through the imagination unlimited fund, supporting young people with items to help them reach their potential and improve their health and well-being.

The Bright Spots survey, 'Your life Your Care' (December 2023) evidenced that nearly all (96%) of the children and young people (8- 17yrs) reported that the adults they lived with showed an interest in their education. This continues to be a Bright Spot of practice.

## We will be there for you when you need us

We know from the Bright Spots survey completed in 2023 that: "The level of trust in social workers was high. 92% of children aged 4-7 years trusted their social worker, 88% of children aged 8-11 also trusted their social worker along with 94% of 11-17 year olds, significantly more than in other local authorities (87%). This is a Bright Spot of practice. The survey also indicated that 'a higher percentage of young people had kept the same social worker in the last year compared to young people (34%) in other local authorities.' The audit program completed throughout the year continues to evidence that social workers are committed to maintaining positive relationships with children and young people, engaging with them and listening to their wishes and feelings.

Bright Spots also told us that for care experienced young adults; "Less than half (48%) of care leavers in Barnet had had the same worker over the past year; a significantly smaller percentage compared to care leavers nationally.' Care leavers experienced greater stability of worker compared to looked after young people aged 11-17 in Barnet'. 40% of care experienced adults felt that their leaving care worker provided them with emotional support.

The Bright Spots survey indicated that for children in care, the level of trust in their social worker was considered high, with 92% of children aged 4-7, 88% of children aged 8-11 and 94% of children aged 11-17 trusted their social worker. This is a slight improvement since 2021.

Most young people (87%) continued to have someone who listened to them. A similar proportion (90%) had someone who told them when they'd done well, up from 88% in 2021. Nine in ten (92%) young women had someone who believed that they would be a success and 87% of men, similar figures to the 2021 survey results (90%).

Over the past year, we have:

- Continued our *Think Care Leaver Ethos* across Family Services and more widely across the Council
- Progressed our commitment to maintaining positive relationships, supporting children and young people in navigating the continuously changing world through spending time with them both in their homes and in the community, alongside engaging in virtual communication on occasion in line with young people's wishes and feelings.

- Developed the life-long offer of support for care experienced young people embedded within our revised and updated Local Offer; young adults are contacted at 6-monthly intervals and reminded of this offer available to them.
- Launched our 21+ offer to provide low-level of support to care experienced young people in line with their wishes.
- Continued to provide safe and secure home environments for children, young people, and adults through child-centred planning for care arrangements taking into consideration children and young people's views and wishes, including their cultural background, relationships and connections in the local area.
- Continued to offer support for children and young people to have their voices heard and views listened too. In partnership with our commissioned advocacy service Action for Children we completed 42 referrals and provided advocacy support to 120 children, up from 52 referrals and provided advocacy support to 98 in 2022/2023.
- Continued to face the challenge of placement sufficiency with creativity and joint working to ensure wherever possible we identified the right placement for every child and when a child moved it was planned and supported the child. When creative approaches were needed, a multi-agency Creative Solutions forum was held and chaired by an Operational Director to ensure robust decision making in the child or young person's best interest.
  - o In the recent Bright Spots Survey, overall 91% of children and young people reported that they 'always' felt safe in their placement. However significantly, 3 (21%) of the children aged 4-7 answered 'no, not always' to feeling safe in their homes. Similar figures were reported in 2021, where 21% of the youngest children aged 4-7 reported not always feeling safe.
  - o Of the young people aged 8-11, 92% felt safe in the home they lived in, compared to 81% in 2021, and of the young people aged 11- 17, 93% always felt safe, compared to 83% in the previous survey.
  - o Two thirds (66%) of care leavers reported that they always felt safe in their home and 61% felt safe in their neighbourhoods.
  - o In the Bright Spots Survey, 76% of care leavers responded 'mainly yes' to the question 'if where you live now right for you?'. This is a significantly larger proportion of care leavers in Barnet compared to care leavers nationally at 68%. This is a Bright Spot of practice.
- Enhanced our placement offer ensuring children and young people are supported through 'rocky' periods, including promoting our out of hours offer to foster carers every weeknight and over the weekend.
- Adapted and developed the training and support offer to foster carers and family carers through a variety of means to ensure the adults trusted to care for our children have the best support available to them to provide the warmth, care and love children and young need to thrive.

- Continued our work with with our colleagues in Youth Justice to ensure young people have the right support available to them when they need it, from police officers to family support workers to psychologists.
- Progressed plans for a pan-London alternative to custody scheme in Barnet where young people live together in a shared house supported by staff to make positive life changes which opened in Autumn 2023.
- Expanded our children's home provisions, launching a solo-placement for one young person, acting as a 'circuit breaker' accommodation to provide them with a place of stability and safety whilst we assess and better understand their needs to identify their longer-term accommodation option.
- Continued to support children and young people with our internal residential accommodation options, including a therapeutic children's home, regular children's home and semi-independent accommodation.
- Progressed our bespoke offer of care and support for Migrant and Separated Children (MASC) previously referred to as Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) and young adult asylum seeking adults through a bespoke team, enhancing our offer through providing a therapeutic provision in partnership with the Anna Freud centre.
- In partnership with Barnet Homes progressed our a shared accommodation provision for former UASC young, at 22 Woodhouse Road supporting them through key worker support to develop the necessary independence skills whilst waiting for their asylum claim to be progressed allowing them to access their permanent accommodation.
- Refurbished the Onwards & Upwards care leaver hub in our continued efforts to make the centre more accessible to young people and partners delivery services and providing a home for young people to return to.
- Piloted a Through Care Team to strengthen support offer for vulnerable 16 and 17 year old requiring more support to achieve independence;

## We will support your mental and physical health

The majority of children and young people who participated in the Bright Spots Survey reported being happy the previous day. A significantly larger proportion of young people (91%) in Barnet reported that they were satisfied with their life, compared to young people (84%) looked after in other local authorities. This is considered a Bright Spot of Practice. Young people aged 11-17 years were asked about how positive they felt about their future, with 71% (81) feeling positive and 20% (21) feeling moderately positive. Only 3% (3) has low scores and did not feel positive about their future, compared to 12% of their peers in the general population and 12% of young people looked after in the care of other local authorities. This is a Bright Spot of Practice.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) reports that 16% of young people aged 16- 24 years in the general population have a long-term health problem or disability. Across all local authorities 24% of care leavers report having long term health problem or disability. In Barnet, 21% (33) young people reported that they had a long-term health or disability that limited their day to day activities; 5% greater than their peers in the general population, but 4% smaller than care leavers in other local



authorities. 44% (15) of young people who were not in employment, education or training reported that this was due to an illness of disability.

Throughout 2023/2024 we have:

- Ensured that 86% of children and young people have a update to date initial and review health assessment.
- Prioritised children and young people accessing dental checks and treatment, with 74% of children having had a dental check in the last 12 months as at 07/04/2024. This is a significant improvement from 2020/2021 where only 31% of children had an in-date dental check, improving to 69% in 2021/2022 and 70% in 2022/2023.
- Continued to provide different activities, from gym membership and cooking classes, to volunteering opportunities for children young people and care experienced young adults.
- Maintained mental health support services for children, young people and care experienced adults that meets their needs, including:
  - online support, for everyone up to the age of 25.
  - In-person and more comprehensive support through Barnet Integrated Clinical Service (BICS) and through our key mental health partners including Terapia.
- Progressed the mental health pathway for young people transitioning out of care and requiring support from adult mental health services through the multi-agency Mental Health Transitions panel which now includes a referral pathway for young people at 17.5 years into adult services.
- For care experienced adults we have enhanced our mental health offer through a bespoke Mental Health transitions practitioner and 4 MH pathways for a trauma informed approaches to working with and supporting young people
- Enhanced the wrap-around support through our bespoke therapeutic support in a home environment at Green Bank House, our 6-bed therapeutic children's home with onsite clinicians developing a therapeutic community with staff and will include foster carers to establish an effective step down into foster carer for residents.
- Continued to progress our Special Educational Needs and Disability Strategy and our Autism Strategy to ensure that children who have additional needs are appropriately supported.
- In partnership with our charity Live Unlimited, we provided 425 hours of Outdoor Club for 12 children and young people aged 6-18, allowing children and young people to connect with nature learn new skills, take risks, build confidence, improve well-being, reduce anxiety and make friends.
- Progressed a number of positive activities with our children in care council (BOP) including a 4-week football project attended by 9 separated and migrant children and trampolining during the February half term, attended by 12 young people over 2 sessions.

## We will listen, communicate, and make decisions together with you

The majority of looked after children in Barnet feel that have a say in the decisions that social workers make about their lives. The Bright Spots survey indicated that 93% of children aged 8-11 all of most of the time, or something, felt they had a say, and 87% of children aged 11- 17 felt all of most of the time or something felt they had a say. A larger proportion of children (93%) aged 8-11 reported that they had a say in the decisions made about their life compared to children (85%) looked after in other local authorities.

Survey results from the Bright Spots survey revealed that 88% of care leavers felt involved in their pathway planning all or most of the time or somethings. Only 5% did not know what a pathway plan was and a small number (3%) of care leavers reported that they did not have a pathway plan.

Throughout 2023/2024 we have:

- Work to further embed the 'All about me' assessment and plan for all children in care that represented the child's wishes and views and set out in a way that they can understand the rationale for their plan and how their needs will be met. Enhanced our commitment to consistently recording children and young people's voices and promoting their wishes and feelings focussing on ensure their voice is at the centre of care planning.
- During the year we supported 27 children and young people to return to care arrangements with their birth family under Special Guardian Orders
- We have continued to meet with children, young people and care experienced adults in person and when required, virtually, ensuring the significant relationship with social worker and/or personal advisors remained strong and supportive to those who needed it most throughout the year. Personal Advisors remained in touch with 100% of young people and visits to children in care remained strong at 78% of children seen within a 6-week timescale and a further 20% seen within 12 weeks, in-line with their care and permanence plans.
- Child in Care reviews continued within timescales providing consistent oversight from the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO). All About Me and Pathway Plans continued to be reviewed when circumstances changed and captured the lived experience of those they reflect. 32% of children had had their review within 3 months and a further 40% of children had had a recent review within the last 6 months as at 07/04/2024.
- We have continued to provide an improved advocacy service as part of the Ofsted recommendation and seen an increase in children and young people accessing this service with 120 children and young people accessing advocacy services in the last 12 month period and 74 referrals made. Advocacy service for care leavers continues to provide an onsite provision at the Woodhouse Road Care Leaver Hub

## We will support you to become independent and prepare for adulthood

The Bright Spots survey, Your Life Beyond Care, states that a significantly larger proportion of care leavers (76%) in Barnet reported that where they lived was right for the compared to care leavers (68%) nationally. This is considered a Bright Spot of Practice.

Financial challenges were identified as an area of concern and change for care experienced young people between the Bright Spot Surveys. 59% of care leavers in Barnet reported 'living comfortably' or 'doing alright' in 2023, compared to 62% in 2021. 19% of care leavers in Barnet found it 'quite' or 'very' difficult to get by financially, compared to 9% in the general population, a slight decrease from the 16% who identified this as a significant worry in the 2021 survey.

Throughout 2022/23 we have:

- Strengthened the Expert by Experience post in Onwards & Upwards to promote feedback loops and co-production of service design and delivery with care experienced young adults.
- Ensured the Strengths and Resilience Group has continued to run throughout the year, both in person and virtually depending on the wants on the attendees and primarily delivered online and co-facilitated by the Expert by Experience.
- Continued to promote Staying Put and Support Lodgings care arrangements with 56 of 17-18 years olds living with their former foster carer and a further 17 of 19-21 year olds living with their former foster carers and supported lodgings hosts.
- Meadow Close our 16+ semi independent provision for 16-21 year olds to support young people preparing for adulthood. Throughout the year, it maintained good occupancy rate with 5 or 6 young people residing in the provision throughout the year.
- O&U has become an accredited ASDAN provider
- Continued promoting the Barnet Supported Living Service helping young people with disabilities to live as independently as possible in their own home.
- Continued to provide financial education to 15-17 years through the Step-ladder program; 67 young people have registered and 16 care experienced young adults have completed the program. 24 young people are currently active in completing the steps (1-5).
- Continued our commitment that whereby all care experienced young adults have access to their health histories to support them in their adult years with their Health Passport
- Developed a specific pathway of independence for migrant and separated children, working collaboratively with the Home Office on the Children's Streamlined Asylum Process (SAP) whereby young people can attend their Home Office Interview onsite at Woodhouse Road supported by their social worker.
- Continued our positive partnership working with Barnet Homes to ensure that all young people aged 16.5 are supported with housing nomination forms to assist their transition to independent living upon their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday or when they are appropriately ready. As part of this ongoing partnership we will launched the Care Leaver Housing Panel in Summer 2023.

- Increased our offer to provide direct housing offers to young people in partnership with Barnet homes to 113, almost double to what was offered in 2022/2023 (66)
- Piloted a project with Barnet Homes that enabled Care experienced parents to move to 2 bedroomed housing and the smaller property they moved out of was ring fenced for care experienced young adults. This was successful and is now incorporated in the Joint Housing Protocol and the Barnet Housing Policies.
- New acquisitions in Colindale new builds have been ring fenced for Care experienced young adults.
- Maintained the services of a designated work coach in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions based at the Onwards and Upwards building offering advice and guidance to care experienced young people.
- Provided 864 hours of driving lessons to 42 young people through our partnership work with the charity, Live Unlimited's Driving Ahead scheme, with 8 young people successfully obtaining their driving license.
- Maintained an average of 65% of care experienced young adults remaining in education, employment and training.

## We will celebrate children & young people, their achievements, identity, and culture

Throughout 2023/2024 we have:

- Continued to implemented recommendations from the Barnet wide Anti-Racism Strategy promoting a work environment that is committed to equality and diversity.
- Continued to run our program of celebration activities, including
  - o The Children in Care Summer Celebration event attended by over 200 children, carers and staff volunteers in July where each child received an award recognising their individual achievements
  - o The annual summer BBQ for care leavers in August, an Eid Celebration and a Christmas Party was hosted by the service
  - o Foster Care Fortnight in May, Foster Care Appreciation Day in October and a Christmas party in December for our carers.
  - o Hosted the inaugural summer fete for children and their special guardians as part of our commitment to recognising, celebrating and supporting children in kinship and special guardian arrangements.
- Acknowledged 79 children, young people and care experienced young adults individual achievements at our Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel through the year, ensuring that each individual received at £10 voucher in recognition of their success.
- Continued to ensure that children and young people's individual care plans acknowledge their difference and reflect nationality, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, gender and disability.

- In the recent Bright Spots Survey 73% of children aged 8-11 years reported that someone had fully explained the reasons why they were in care, 8% greater than children looked after in other local authorities.
  - Around four-fifths of care leavers has had an explanation of why they had been in care. However, 13% wanted to know more and 8% had no received an explanation for why they were had been in care. This is a slight improvement with 79% of care leavers knowing their care journey, up from 77% in 2021.
  - 72% of children aged 11-17 were referred to experiencing high / very high happiness with appearance, a significant increase from 57% in 2021.
- Despite national challenges to recruitment, we have remained committed to recruiting foster carers from diverse backgrounds to support children and young people settling into their homes and feeling safe, secure and understood.
  - Developed a specific UASC pathway for unaccompanied asylum seeking young people and asylum seeking adults, including partnership work with education, health and mental health through the bespoke UASC team
  - Faciliated by BOP, the children in care council, hosted a staff training session on the needs of LGBTQIA+ children and young people attended by 25 colleagues. The training focused on some recent research into the experiences of young LGBT+ children in care (they are overrepresented) and what staff can do to support them, including the sharing of resources. We have since developed a #BOP Pride sticker and badge for staff to use on lanyards and laptops.

## Voice of the Child

My Say Matters: Child Participation and Family Involvement Strategy (MSM) was co-produced with children and young people during 2021 and supported a child-led launch in May 2022; a report on the first year of activity and impact is available online [here](#). My Say Matters has provided a platform from which our commitment to involving children and young people in developing and shaping our policies and services has been built. We are proud of the work that the children and young we are supporting have led and co-produced with us and how widely children and young people’s voices are being heard across the council. The concept of co-production continues to expand and embed providing opportunity for greater involvement from young people representing a wide range of backgrounds including some lesser heard voices. Young people in Barnet want and expect to be listened to and the Council is responding to this demand.

Between November and December 2023 we asked young children, young people and care experienced adults to share with us their views on how they were feeling with the survey You Life, your care and Your Life Beyond Care, run in partnership with Coram and the Rees Centre. Below are some comments from young people:

*‘I miss my mum, but in 6 weeks I will go to a mum and dad visit at a new place. It would be better to go back to Auntie. Actually, I want all of them to be in one house!’*

*‘I live my family. I want to see my mum more times and my dad only in the afternoon or afternoon.’*

*'Care can be a handful if you've had terrible experiences. It would be good to have a little more trust and freedom'*

*'I like living here. I would like the wider bed.'*

*'I have enjoyed my time with [my] carer and family. it was a bit difficult with the other person.'*

*'I want my mum to pass the assessment at court do they say that me and my brother can go back home. I am happy with the care provided by my carers through.'*

We have progressed the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-2023 ensuring that voice of young people remains central to our corporate commitment to achieving an excellent service. And we will be using the Bright Spots results and feedback from children, young people and care experienced adults to inform our updated Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024 – 2027 currently being drafted. We have continued to provide an improved advocacy service as part of the Ofsted recommendation with 120 up from 98 in 2022/2023 children and young people accessing advocacy services throughout the year. This is being reflected in practice, with majority audits under the domain Child's Voice and Engagement being graded as 'good' and some with outstanding features.

On 1<sup>st</sup> August 2023, Corporate Parenting once again hosted our annual Family Fun Day attended by over 200 children, parents, carers and staff volunteers. The theme of this year's event was expanded from 2022's *Belonging* to this year's *Inclusion* with a particular emphasis on welcoming those in our LGBT+ community and disabled children. The event included the awards ceremony where every child and young person received a certificate documenting their individual achievement and which was presented by Barnet's Mayor and MC'd by three senior members of the Children in Care Council. Certificates recognised a range of achievements from passing exams, taking their first steps, leaning to swim, successfully obtaining their driving license and excelling in activities like dance or sport. Feedback from carers noted positive reflections on the range of activities available for children and young people including the availability of sensory activities for children of all ages, and noted a boost in confidence for children and young people.

The annual summer BBQ for our care experienced young adults held at Woodhouse Road on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> July, was another fun-filled day with amazing Jamaican food, live music, dancing and games. The team worked hard to ensure young people attended and that the food and events was a reflection of them and what they wanted the day to be about. Young people were consulted on the design and delivery of everything, along with being DJ on the day. Representative of the diversity of our young people, the event provided games and sensory activities, along with a quieter space for our care experienced parents who attended with their children. The day ended with singing and dancing into the evening.

Feedback from young people who attended was positive, and professionals who attended and supported young people attending shared that it was another well-organised and successful event hosted by the dedicated staff team.

Between October 25<sup>th</sup> and November 1<sup>st</sup>, Onwards and Upwards developed and hosted Care Leavers Week at the centre with a number of varied and diverse activities to reflect young people's needs and interests. Centred on the theme *Time to Care: Celebrating to care leavers; Amplify their voices; Raise*

awareness of challenges, and *Encourage change in policy and practice* celebrate the week-long event included:

- TheraPlay session: parenting support to help parents delivered with Barnet Early Years Parenting Hub
- Boxercise Workshop
- Cooking workshops, including Juicy Jollof Bar
- Thorpe Park Fright Night, delivered in partnership with Live Unlimited
- Film Screening
- Art workshop

Feedback from the young people identified that they appreciated the opportunity to come together at the Woodhouse Road Care Leaver centre. Some of the events had smaller numbers of attendees, however the trip to Thorpe Park Fright Night was a great success!

The Carer Support Team hosted their first Special Guardianship Summer Fun Day in August at the Arkley Village Hall in Barnet. This fun event for Special Guardians and their families to attend was planned in response to what children and young people had told the Carer Support Team that they would like the opportunity to meet with other children who cannot live with their parents and live with grandparents, aunts, uncles and ex-foster carers. We also wanted to celebrate Special Guardians and respond to their requests for more opportunities to get together as families in a fun and relaxed environment.

We had 44 Special Guardians, children and young people attending the event and we have had overwhelmingly positive feedback from Special Guardians, children and staff and it was amazing to see children, who carry heavy loads of invisible trauma, attachment and loss, able to relax and enjoy themselves in an environment that understands them.

## Children in Care Profile

Barnet has continued to have a stable figure of children coming into care with 327 children in care on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. Although the numbers have stayed stable the cohort has changed over time with an increasing number of UASCs, vulnerable adolescents entering care in their late teens as a result of the risks of exploration and youth violence while the younger children coming into care are increasingly being placed with family members as their connected carers, allowing them to continue living within their familiar family network.

Children having to leave their family homes and coming into the care of Barnet family services do so for a number of different reasons, however for the majority (54%) of these children and young people, it is on account of abuse and neglect and absent parenting (28%). This reflects no significant change to 2022/2023.

The following table shows our cohort of children in care (327) as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024:

LAC	UASC	Total
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Gender	Male	61%	92%	55%
	Female	39%	8%	45%
Ethnicity	Any Other Ethnicity	13%	45%	5%
	Asian	7%	33%	1%
	Black	13%	13%	10%
	Gypsy/Roma	1%	0%	1%
	Mixed	26%	0%	26%
	White	39%	8%	37%
	Not Stated	2%	0%	2%
Age on Starting Care	0 to 10	37%	0%	36%
	11 to 13	7%	2%	13%
	14 to 15	15%	17%	14%
	16 to 17	41%	80%	37%

Children aged 0-10 coming into care currently has remained low, at 36%, similar to 36% in 2022/2023 and previously at 48% in 2021/2022, 64% in 2020/2021 and 67% in 2020/2019. This was previously attributed to a decrease in referrals from the early years provisions and schools due to Covid restrictions. Young people aged 14 and 17 continue to represent that highest cohort of children entering care, steady at 51%. These young people are entering the care system with complex presentations from years of living in chaotic and neglected home environments and their challenging behavioural needs often need additional support packages to provide them with the much needed stability and security.

Older young people aged 16-17 have continued to represent a larger proportion of our children in care population remaining consistent at 37%. The majority (80%) of these young people are separated and migrant children. Some older adolescents aged 16 -17, have continued to struggle in the care of their parents and have sought assistance and support outside of their family network which has led to referrals into social care. 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. In many cases there have been missing episodes and some substance misuse, and in some cases child sexual or criminal exploitation.

Children and young people continue to be in the care of the Local Authority through three different legal pathways; 39% of children were voluntary accommodated under S.20 of the Children's Act (1989), 36% were subject to Care Orders and in our care for the duration of their childhood and 20% of children were subject to Interim Care Orders with their care arrangements continuing to be determined by the Courts. These figures evidence no significant change from the previous 3 years. 8



children were adopted throughout 2023/2024, 4 of these children had been in early permanence placements with their prospective forever families and homes.

18 children had been granted placement orders and were waiting either for the Court to endorse their forever family with the making of an Adoption Order or for family finding to identify and match them with adopters. Throughout the year Barnet had 7 children in early permanence placements, whereby young children, usually babies are placed with dual approved adopters and foster carers. Throughout the year Barnet had one of the highest referral rates for early permanence placements across the 6 boroughs in the North London Regional Adoption Agency. The benefit of this care arrangement is that children are placed at the earliest opportunity with carers who have been identified and matched to meet their needs and provide them with their permanent home. While the adoption is not guaranteed, this arrangement ensures children are provided with the stability of one potential separation from their primary caregiver, usually their birth parent, reduces points of transition and aids their lifecourse journey, as their first non-family member carer is potentially their last.

### Case study: Sofia's Story

Sofia was referred to Adopt London North prior to her birth, following her birth mother's recognition that she was not ready to be a mother; she felt that she was unable to provide a baby financial stability as well as the time and care a baby would need to thrive. Bravely, Sofia's birth mother engaged positively with the assessment process, sharing her honest wishes for her daughter's future and details of her own life journey to support Sofia as she comes to understand her identity and who she throughout her childhood and adolescents.

Sofia spent two weeks in foster care with a foster carer, before moving to her prospective adoptive home with her prospective adoptive parents Catherine and Daniel. As Sofia's birth mother was in agreement to her being adopted and consented to the Court process and orders, Sofia's adoption with Catherine and Daniel was granted when she was 9 months old.

Catherine and Daniel are committed to Sofia and ensuring she is aware of her birth story and her identity inherited from her birth parents. They ensure as a family they celebrate all appropriate festivals and recognise Sofia's birth mother and birth father's cultural identity and background.

The social workers who initially supported Sofia's birth mother through the difficult decision to relinquish her care of Sofia worked in partnership with colleagues in Adopt London North and the children in care service to support difficult decisions and discussions. Feedback from Sofia's birth mother suggests that she felt very supported and appreciated the sensitive approach professionals had with her. She also requested support from social workers in naming Sofia, as she herself found this decision too difficult. Feedback from her forever family has noted how supportive the social work team has been and welcomed the assistance with life story work.

Continuing with our resilience-based approach social work practice, our teams across Family Services remain committed to all children remaining within their birth family where possible and safe to do so.

In the last year we entered care proceedings in respect of 89 children, a slight increase from 2022/2023 (80) and a slight decrease from the 99 children in 2022/2021.

88 children had their care proceedings concluded within the Court, up from 82 in 2022/2023 similar figures to 2021/2022, achieving permanence in their care arrangements, through the following:

- 53 children achieved permanence through alternative care arrangements outside of the care of their birth families, a steady number at 60% since 2022/2023.
  - 17 children achieved care plans of adoption through the granting of a placement orders, a significant increase from the 3 children where Placement Orders were granted in 2022/2023
  - 13 children generally older children, were provided with permanence through long term care orders, the majority of whom will remain in foster care, down from 19 in 2022/2023
  - 23 children were placed in the care of their wider families by virtual of Special Guardianship orders, an increasing upward trend
- 33 children remain or have returned home to their birth families and will remain subject to continued intervention and monitoring by Family Services, however they are no longer children in care. This is a slight decrease from the 35 children during the previous year.
  - 22 children were returned home to the care of their parents under a Supervision Order, similar figures to 2022/2023
  - 4 children were returned home to their families under No Order,

## Care Proceedings

	Total open proceeding within the year	Number Issued	Number Concluded	Concluded <30 Weeks	Concluded 30 -50 Weeks	Concluded 50 + Weeks
23 - 24	194	89	88	26(29%)	19 (22%)	43 (49%)
22 - 23	181	80	82	20 (24%)	27 (33%)	35 (43%)

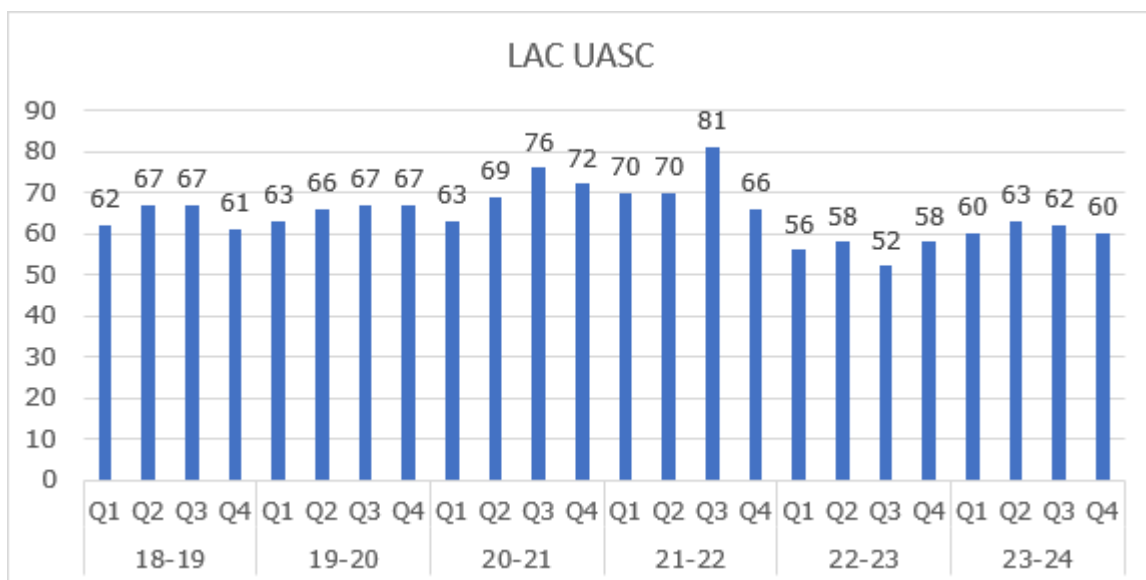
  

April – March	Total Concluded	PO	CO	SO	SGO	No Order	Other
23 - 24	88	17	13	22	23	4	9
22 - 23	82	3	19	22	20	5	13

## Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

Throughout the year, Barnet has continued to see an increase in number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) coming into care (see below table) from previous year. At the end of March 2023, 67 of our children in care were UASC, significant increase of 58 from 2022/2023 and a return to

similar figures (68) to 2021/2022. In 2022 responding to the changing need of our young people and the referral process, with the majority of children being referred into Barnet through the mandated National Transfer Scheme (NTS) rather than presenting in borough or through being placed as adults in hotel accommodation at one of the 5 Home Office dispersal sites, we developed the bespoke Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Team based within our leaving care service. The UASC team continues to work with all unaccompanied asylum seeking children and is comprised of social workers and personal advisors. The team continues to accept referrals directly from MASH ending unnecessary transition points for these young people, alongside holding expertise and experience in relation to age assessments and immigration processes and law. Having a dedicated team working with separated and migrant children ensures smooth transition for asylum seeking children to asylum seeking adults, many who will continue to experience an uncertain immigration status due to delays with the Home Office



In March 2023, we launched on-site ESOL provision for UASC/former UASC. 2 courses ran during the year, with 18 young people graduating. The impact of the onsite provision is measurable beyond their educational achievements. The class formed close and supportive friendships, or as they have self-described the group, a “brotherhood” has been formed. Onwards and Upwards hosted a graduation ceremony for the young people to celebrate their achievements which was positively received.

### UASC Housing

Seeking to replicate a similar model of minimised transitions, we partnered with Barnet Homes to acquire a stand-alone property of studio accommodation for young people looked-after as children seeking asylum who are ready to develop their independent living skills as adults. The model developed allows the young people to remain at the property until they received a substantive decision from the Home Office, and where this is positive, until they are nominated for their permanent accommodation by Barnet Homes. The vision remains to offer a local accommodation option close to the office for no recourse asylum-seeking young people approaching their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, so that there would be increased oversight, support, contact and welfare checks for the

residents. A property was identified and the first young person moved in to the property in November 2022.

## Education / The Virtual School

The Virtual School acts as a champion for Children in Care by fulfilling the responsibilities of being a highly ambitious, proactive, and effective Corporate Parent. There is a clear emphasis on the need to raise aspirations and improve rates of progress and to close the attainment gap between looked after children and their peers.

### 1. Key Performance Indicators 2023-2024

Key Performance Indicator
Average Progress 8 score of looked-after children in the top 10% when compared to CIC nationally.
Gap between (i) A8 for Barnet CIC and A8 nationally for all pupils and (ii) P8 for Barnet CIC and P8 nationally for all pupils is in the top quartile. (2020/21 results)
90% of 0–16-year-olds PEPs are good or better
75% of 16–17-year-olds PEPs are good or better
RWM in KS2, at the expected standard, is in the top quartile
The percentage of 16–17-year-olds who are NEET is below 20% by the end of March 2024

Over the year there has been minimal changes to the data previously reported in since 2022/2023. There has been a slight decrease in children receiving SEND support with 36(19%) children and young people down from 25%. There has also been a steady trend of children and young people receiving support through an Education and Health Care Plan over the past three years. 33% of all looked after children have been assessed as having additional needs requiring the support provided through an EHCP, compared to 24.9% in 2019/2020. This is likely to remain the result of the trauma many children experience prior to coming into care, and the adverse childhood experiences (ACES) which subsequently impact on their capacity to learn, socialise and settle in a school environment. The migrant and separated children (formerly referred to as Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children) cohort of statutory school age children has continued the reduction trend seen in previous years, now at 15 compared to 21 in 2022/2023 and 28 in 2021/2022 and 35 in 2020/2021. Migrant and Separated children are likely entering care as older adolescents and requiring the support and service of college education opposed to statutory secondary schooling.

**The below table illustrate the key performance indicators the education provision for our young people:**

### 2. School Context (as of 26/03/24)

		2019/ 2020		2020/ 2021		2021/ 2022		2022/23		Autumn Term 2023		Spring Term 2024	
	Nursery	11		12		13		14		15		13	
	% of children SEN support			2		1		3		1		2	
	% of children with EHCPS			3		1		2		2		2	
Statutory age group	Statutory age	196		195		191		186		179		181	
	Reception	4		7		8		8		11		12	
	Key Stage 1	16		14		15		21		15		13	
	Key Stage 2	43		37		45		45		52		48	
	Key Stage 3	51		53		52		48		42		43	
	Key Stage 4	82		84		71		64		59		65	
	Male/female	113/83		109/86		108/83		115/71		102/77		108/73	
	% of children from ethnic minority groups	70.6%		73.3%		68.1%		67.2%		65.9%		66.9%	
	% of children SEN support	19.8% (39)		21.5% (42)		17.8% (34)		24% (45)		18.4% (33)		19.9% (36)	
	% of children with EHCPS	24.9% (49)		24.6% (48)		30.9% (59)		32.8% (61)		31.8% (57)		33.1% (60)	
		O/B	I/B	O/B	I/B	I/B	I/B	O/B	I/B	O/B	I/B	O/B	I/B
		33	16	30	18	38	21	41	20	35	20	36	20
Number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC)	25		35		28		21		10		15		
Children without a school place	0		2		5		6		6		9		

Post 16 age group	Post 16	135		152		155		147		138		150	
	Male/female	96/39		113/39		111/44		102/45		97/41		105/45	
	% of children from ethnic minority groups	78.5%		79.6%		79.4%		83%		81.9%		83.3%	
	% of children with EHCPS	14%(19)		13.8%(21)		14.8% (23)		16.3% (24)		18.1% (25)		18.7% (28)	
		O/B	I/B	O/B	I/B	O/B	I/B	O/B	I/B	O/B	I/B	O/B	I/B
		11	3	16	5	7	16	14	10	16	9	17	11
	Number of UASC	67		76		75		66		60		68	
Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET) Year 12	11		19		15		18		8		9		
Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET) Year 13	14		14		22		20		24		28		

### Not In Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

All Post-16 the young people not in education, employment or training present a significant challenge and engaging them is no easy task. The category includes those in psychiatric units, pregnant or who frequently go missing thus are even harder to engage in education or training.

In 2023, 38% of care leavers were NEET nationally. Currently, we have 25% of our Year 12 and 13's who are NEET.

Supporting young people who are NEET is a key area and caseworkers work closely with them to support reengagement into education, employment, or training. The BEETs team support with connections within various industries whereby companies head hunt young people who are searching

for either a work placement or apprenticeship. Construction and motor vehicle apprenticeship/placement continue to be of interest to young people.

Over the year, the Virtual School has continued to support young people's well-being, engagement, and achievement through the support of the John Lyons Foundation, in several different ways including:

- Reading Club
- Residential trip to Jamie's Farm for 5 UASC young people
- Visit to Downing Street with Harrow
- Music Lessons with Barnet Education Music Trust
- Care to Dance – 12 week dance lessons
- Element Creative Project for UASC young people utilising creative tools for self expression

## Placement Sufficiency

Adhering to our *Who We Place Where* documented commitment of placing the children in the right care arrangement at the right time, 210(64%) children are living with foster carers, an increase from 183 (54%) in 2022/2023 and similar to figures (60%) in 2022/2023. Within this arrangement 95 (29%) of these children live with Barnet foster carers and further 115 (35%) children live with independent foster carers, registered with independent fostering agencies. This evidences an increase to 64% of children living in a foster care arrangement up from 52% in 2021/2022 and a return to 2020/2021 figures (60%). Despite the continuation of shortage of foster carers nationally, internally we have 99 fostering households. Although recruitment has continued, we have not been able to increase the number of foster care placements available for our children, sadly impacting placement choice and availability for more children. However, despite these the ongoing challenges our recruitment drive has remained strong.

Combining outreach events with online recruitment and using social media platforms including Facebook and Instagram has remained beneficial and this flexible approach has provided effective and aspirational high-quality campaigns. Through our creative and dynamic use of Facebook live events and Instagram stories, along with our film launch 'The Difference is You' we received 227 initial enquiries, and recruited 5 fostering households. Whilst this is a significant increase in enquiries from previous years, individuals and family's who make enquiries do not necessarily commit to an assessment. Heading into the new year, there are 8 fostering assessments that are underway, indicating that 2024/2025 will see an increase in fostering recruitment.

In July 2022 we released our fostering film, The Difference is You which was streamed across social media and London-based television channels channel 5, Barnet TV and local cinemas. This was followed by the UK-wide John Lewis Christmas advertisement supporting the need for more foster carers across the country.

The below table outlines the breakdown of placements for children in Barnet as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024:

Internal

LBB Fostering	68	59%
Connected Persons (kinship)	27	23%
Placed for Adoption	6	5%
Internal Residential	6	5%
Parental	8	7%
All Internal	115	35%
Agency Fostering	115	54%
Semi Independence	57	27%
External Residential	36	17%
Secure/YOI	4	2%
All External	212	65%
Overall Total	327	

## Placement stability

Our revised Placement Sufficiency Strategy (2023-2027) sets out how we will meet our legal duty to ensure there is sufficient accommodation for children in care within the local area and address any identified gaps in provision through robust plans and commissioning strategies. The strategy also outlines the steps we will take to secure sufficient accommodation for our children; providing them with the right placement at the right time which is of high quality and provides them with the love and support they need to achieve their full potential.

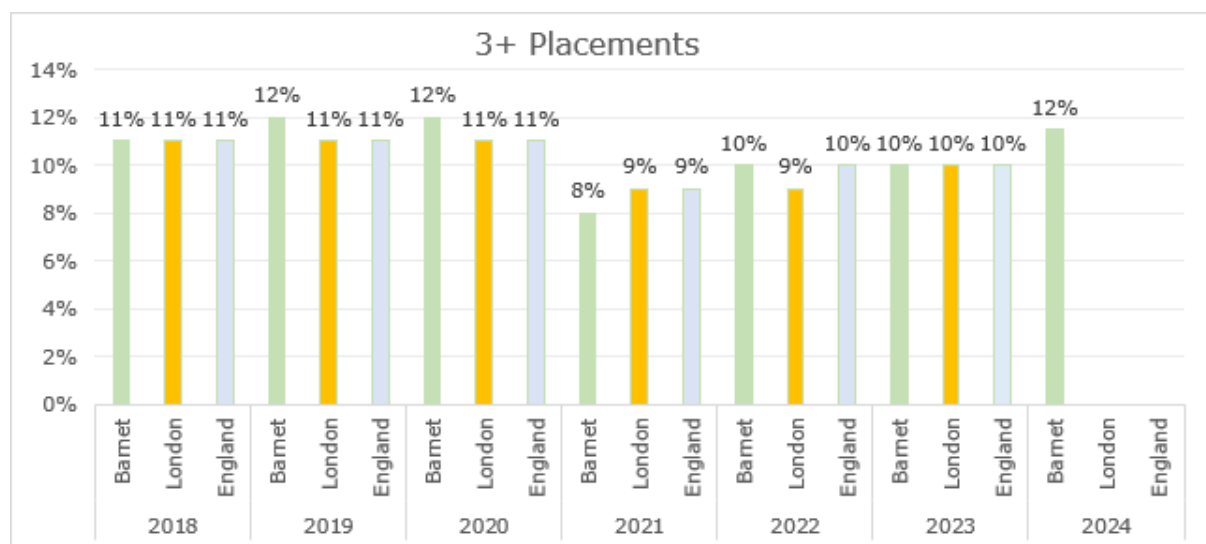
The majority of children continue to live in homes with foster carers, in line with our Who We Place Where and our Placement Sufficiency Strategy (2023 – 2027) and our commitment to ensure that children are living in arrangements that best meet their individual needs. As outlined in the above, the profile of Barnet’s looked after children has shifted, whereby older adolescents are entering the care system, often in crises and having traumatic life experiences displayed thought difficult and complex behavioural needs. A consequence of this is that professionals have a limited understanding of the young person’s needs, and identifying the right placement initially is not easy.

Despite this local and national landscape, we have successfully ensured that the majority of children and young people (219 children, 64%) experienced the stability of the same home in the past 12 months , representing an increase from 58% in 2022/2023 indicating that our approach to providing wrap-around support and targeted intervention is ensuring positive benefits to children and their carers. Over the last 12 months 88 children experience a placement move, while 33 children experienced a placement moves of 3 or more. The majority of children who experienced 3 or more

placement moves can continue to be categorised into three cohorts, those coming new into care in a crisis and tend to move from an emergency placement to medium or long term placements quite quickly, those experiencing an unplanned move because their escalating needs, and those moving back to within their birth family or their permanent care arrangement.

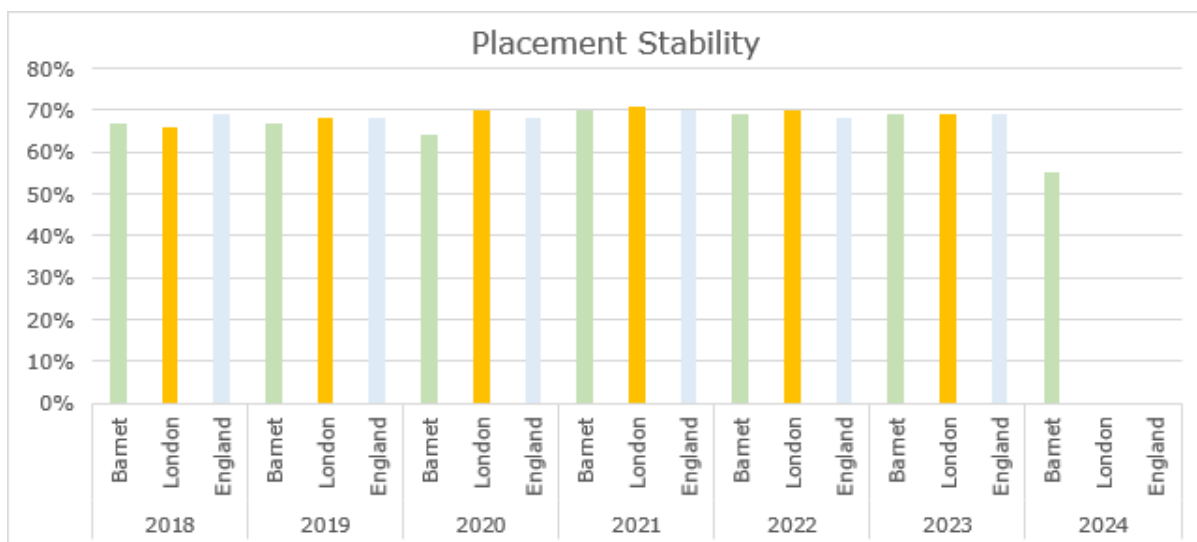
We recognise that children and young people need stability and permanency in their lives and to know their care arrangement is the right home for them. As part of our ‘Who we place where’ protocol, all children and young people who move placements are now routinely reviewed within our permanency tracking meeting to ensure their next move, as far as possible, is their final destination. Some moves continue to be undertaken in order to ensure a child or young person’s needs are best met and where they are safeguarded effectively. Older young people, those 15 years and over and who have come into care as an adolescent continue to be more likely to experience 3 or more placements, as their needs change in line with their shifting neurodevelopment and behaviours.

The chart below outlines the number of moves children and young people experienced during 2023/2024 with a yearly comparison across Barnet, London and England of children in care who have had 3 or more placements in the year:



Below is the comparison of children in care under 16 years old who have been in care continuously for 2.5 years and have been living in the same placement for at least 2 years, or are placed for adoption and their adoptive placement together with their previous placement, last for at least 2 years:





## Internal Residential Provisions

### New Park House

New Park House is one of two children's homes run by Barnet. This home looks after up to six young people between the ages of 11 and 18 and is a medium to long term provision. The home also provides emergency accommodation for children. It is a very well-established home with experienced staff caring for an eclectic mix of young people. New Park House was inspected by Ofsted in June 2023, with an outcome of good for the overall experiences and progress of children and young people.

### Meadow Close

Meadow Close is a 6 bed 16+ semi independent provision that supports 16-21 year olds develop their independent skills in preparation for having their own tenancy and moving to independent adulthood. Meadow Close was repurposed from a children's home to 16+ provision in July 21 and has had nearly 100% occupancy throughout the year with some moving on into alternative care arrangements and/or their own accommodation living independently following their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. The property has been undergoing renovations to ensure we provide a homely-feeling of shared accommodation for young adults where they can develop into confident adults.

### Greenbank House

Greenbank House is a 6 bed therapeutic Ofsted registered children's home that officially opened in August 2021. All admissions are planned, and children are assessed as to whether the home will meet their needs and if they will match well with other children in the home. Throughout the year there have been 4 children who have called Green Bank House home.

Ofsted undertook their first inspection of Greenbank House on 25 – 26 January 2023 and the outcome was graded with an overall rating of Good. The report noted:

*Children like living in the home. One child said that staff are 'cool and helpful'. Children engage in activities that they have not had the opportunity to experience before, for example, going for a meal in a restaurant. One child likes to keep fit and attends a local martial arts club.*

*Children benefit from the integrated therapeutic model of care provided by two inhouse therapists. The clinical team provides individual sessions to children. When necessary, clinicians have brought in external professionals to complete specialist assessments. This ensures that drift and delay are minimised and children receive the correct support for their individual needs.*

## **Moving Forward 1**

This project maintains the eligibility criteria for care experienced young people who identify as male, aged over 18, who have access to public funds, and where their Section 24 Housing Nomination Form has been completed.

Between April 2022 and May 2022 there were 2 tenants, with one moving into his long-term accommodation in June and 3 new tenants moved into the property in summer 2022. From August 2022 to 31st March 2023 there were 4 tenants, therefore the property maintained 100% occupancy.

Throughout the year, the project has maintained the integrity of its exit pathway with 80% of the young people progressing to their permanent accommodation. One care leaver tenant was supported to access a period of transitional accommodation to further develop his ability to sustain the liability of independent living.

Feedback from residents at the Moving Forward project accommodation is that they feel supported. They experience supported opportunities to develop independence and manage the day-to-day responsibilities of managing a tenancy within a supported environment, including negotiating repairs and managing access requirements for contractors.

## **Moving Forward 2**

This accommodation, also referred to as 'the training flat', is a standalone provision and was the original moving forward project property. From April 2022 to March 2023 this project has maintained 100% occupancy. In December the property was vacated to enable refurbishment works to take place. Until these are completed, an alternative property has been provided by Barnet Homes, ring-fenced as the 'training flat'.

The flat is currently occupied by a young person who has additional care and support needs and requires a Care Assessment to be undertaken to support her progression to long-term accommodation. Before moving to the 'training flat', this young person was in denial about her care needs and unable to recognise that she would benefit from ongoing support to manage independence. The period of time at this accommodation has enabled her to test independent living skills in a supportive environment, and to have a better understanding of the realities of the liabilities of independent living.

## Special Guardianship Children & Carers

### Case Study: Louise and Clare's story.

Janet is a 61 year old grandmother of two granddaughters who live with her under Special Guardianship Orders. Louise was 11 years old when removed from her mother's care and Clare was 3 years old. The children were removed from their mother's care due to harm from neglect, mother's drug and alcohol abuse, abusive relationships and mental health difficulties. There is no information about birth father or paternal family. Louise is now 18 years old and Clare is 10 years old. Both children have made the decision not to have contact with their birth mother.

The Carer Support Team has been supporting the family since the order was granted in 2016 and has included:

- Weekly SG allowance for Clare and a discretionary allowance paid until July 2024 for Louise as she is in full time online education.
- Commissioning and applications made for AGSF funded therapeutic support for Louise for a short period of time.
- Referred Louise to Prince's Trust, BOOST and BEETS for support around education/further training.
- Commissioning and applications written for ASGSF funded therapeutic support for Clare who has found this consistent play therapy a useful space for her to explore difficult issues.
- Advocating for Clare to have further assessments via CAMHS resulting in assessments for Autism and ADHD and a subsequent diagnosis of ADHD.
- Collaborating with a paediatrician for an assessment of Clare's sleep concerns which resulted in further testing and prescription of melatonin.
- Provided supporting statement for Clare's EHCP application.
- Advocating on Janet's behalf with a local hospice for further support when Carl became aggressive in the last stages of his life and this impacted on the children.
- Emotional support for Janet when Carl was terminally ill and after he died.
- Referral made to the Mayors fund for financial support towards school uniform for Clare.
- Co-ordinating regular 1-3 monthly review meetings to bring multi-agency professionals together to see how best services can support Clare.
- Direct work with Clare to explore her wishes and feelings around contact with her birth mother resulting in Clare drawing a picture to send to her mother and her wish for her mother to send her a birthday card.
- The CST Contact lead worked with birth mother to share Clare's drawing and support her to send Clare a birthday card. Support was offered to Janet and birth mother about how contact might be managed for Clare to having some form of contact, however due to birth mother's difficult and unpredictable emotional presentation, Clare decided not to have ongoing contact.
- Supporting Janet to complete a DLA form for Clare to access financial support given the impact of her ADHD.
- Referral to Family Holiday Charity for the family to access a UK holiday.
- Direct work with Clare to explore how professional can support her to attend school as she has been school refusing resulting in low school attendance and ongoing liaison with Education Welfare Officer about Clare's school attendance.
- Janet attends our regular SG brunches facilitated by the CST.

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In 2023/2024, 27 children achieved stability through, going to live with their wider family members under a Special Guardianship Order, up from 13 in 2021/2022 and 20 in 2022/2023. Throughout the year were 184 Special Guardians who received a financial allowance from the Local Authority to support them in caring for 250 children. We completed 166 Viability Assessments, 66 Special Guardian and Connected Carer assessments and 24 assessments of family carers assessed as foster carers for children within their family network.

In 2021/2022 we undertook a peer learning review regarding our Special Guardianship care arrangements and have reviewed and updated our Special Guardianship Procedures and our Financial Policy

Following the review of our procedures, we have now committed to undertake an annual review of all Special Guardians, undertake 3 social work visits to the children and family in the first year following the making of the Special Guardianship Order and to provide all children with the opportunity of engaging in lifestory work. We have reviewed our Special Guardianship Policy and our Financial policy, both due to be published later in the year. In response to the DfE's strategy Stable Homes Built on Love, we are strengthened our service provision.

In 2023/2024 we have:

- Strengthened our preparation group run jointly by the Carer Assessment and Carer Support Team, ensuring this a mandated element for prospective carers to attend within their assessment process.
- Throughout the year provided 7 preparation groups to prospective special guardians, ensuring they are provided with appropriate information and guidance alongside the opportunity to make connections within a special guardian network.
- Extended the training offer to Special Guardians, mirroring the therapeutic training provided to foster carers specifically around trauma-informed behaviour, alongside Great Behaviour Breakdown and Non-Violence Resistance training
- Hosted 3 special guardian support brunches
- Launched the annual summer fair day for special guardians and their children, which was positively received by all who attended.
- 19 families were provided with intensive supported over the year,
- 23 lifestory books and letters were completed and 70 children on the waiting list for lifestory work.
- 13 families are receiving support for contact between special guardians and birth parents

The Department of Education launched the Stable Homes Build on Love Strategy, making a number of recommendations, including a recognition of 'harnessing the value of family networks by supporting the kinship care system...' The strategy provides a focus on improving the support provided to special guardians and proposes a reduction in the barriers these carers experienced. The Department for

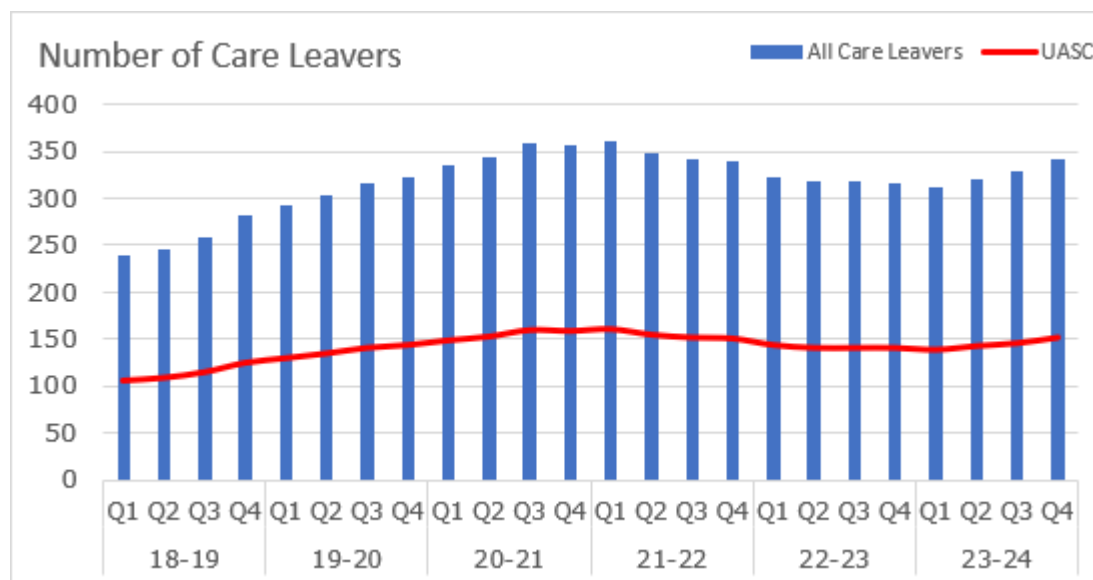
Education (DfE) has committed to a £9 million investment in kinship training and support to carers, and is exploring how this can be delivered through a new financial allowance, workplace entitlements and options for an extension of legal aid to carers becoming special guardians or those who care for children under Child Arrangement Orders. To address these reform changes, we have written a kinship care strategy due to be launched in summer 2024.

## Care Experienced Adults

*“Today's visit to Onwards and Upwards was a great opportunity to see how care leavers are supported to establish and maintain social connections, helping them avoid the negative effects loneliness can have. “I was particularly impressed by the personal approach the hub took to supporting care leavers, helping them develop the skills and confidence to take their next steps.*

Minister for Loneliness, Right Honourable Stuart Andrew (January 2024)

During 2023/2024 the number of care leavers remained steady at 336, a slight increase from 315 in 2022/2023 and decrease from 341 in 2021/2022. While our care experienced population remains steady, the number of young adults who are former asylum seeking children (UASC), continues to increase, making up 46% of our leaving care cohort, a steady increase from 42% in 2022/2023 and a third in 2021/2022.



Most of our care leavers are aged between 18 - 20 years old (235; 70%) with 15% (49) aged 21 years old and 15% (50) 22 years or older. This correlates to the data from the previous 2 years and continued

to evidence a limited change in the demographic. The concerns noted for care experienced young adults during the 2020/2021 years of the global covid pandemic have continued to remain a significant challenge with the ongoing cost of living crises and young people continue expressing concerns about their mental health, their finances and their housing.

The Bright Sport Survey, Your Life Beyond Care evidenced that in comparison to their peers in the general population, care experienced young people in Barnet were twice as likely to report they were experiencing financial difficulties. Young adults expressed worries about their financial difficulties and money management, a lack of income and increasing expenses. As the Barnet's leaving care cohort is comprised of a significant high number of former separated and child migrants, who are now asylum seeking young adults, it is unsurprising that many of these young people experience financial hardships and worries about money management in a context of sending money home to family, or paying of the debt accrued through their journey to the UK.

*'Money is very tight at the moment.'*

*'I can manage money very well. However, expenses are so high, an bills hit you out of nowhere...'*

The Bright Spots survey also indicated that care experienced young people in Barnet were more likely to report that they often / always felt proud and did not often / always feel angry. Both of these were identified as Bright Spots of practice. However, in comparison to their peers in the general population, care experienced young people in Barnet were less likely to report that they felt confident in handling their personal problems. They are less likely to state that things were going their way, that they felt happy yesterday, felt satisfied with their life, that the things they did in their life felt worthwhile. They are more likely to report that they often / always felt lonely and had high anxiety.

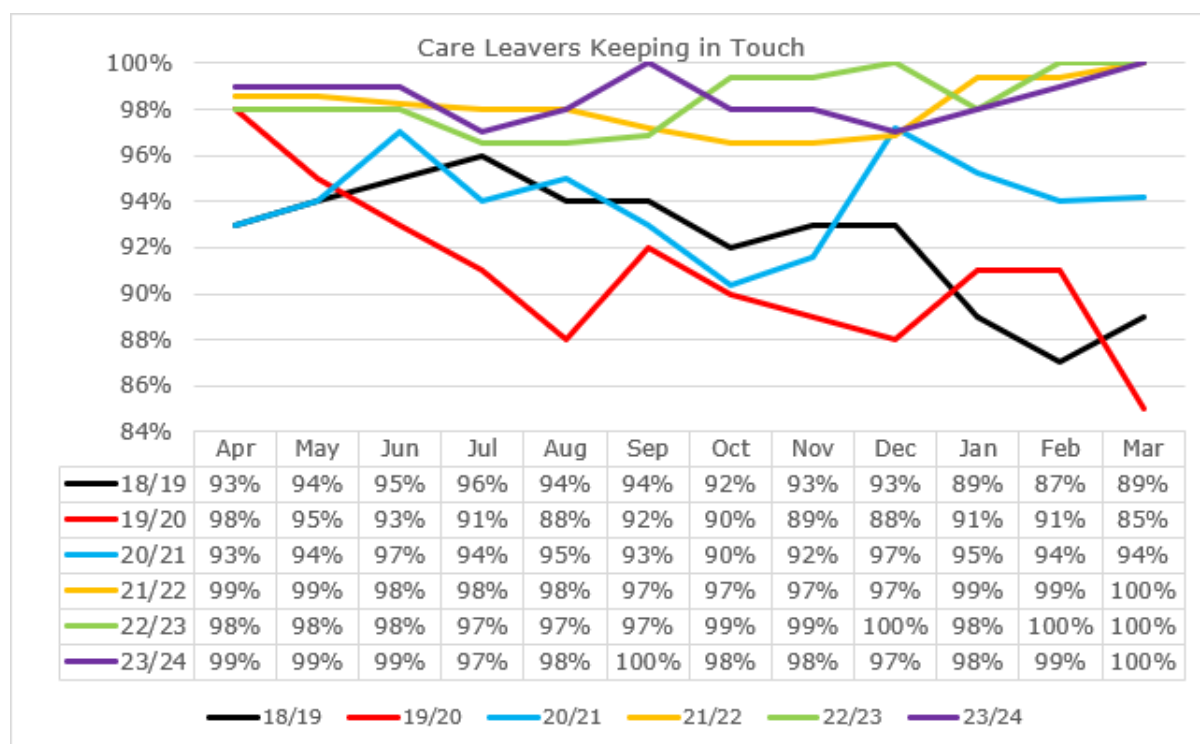
These shifts continue to be attributable in-part to the increased former UASC cohort, who remain in need of support from the Leaving Care service for accommodation and subsistence until their asylum application has been resolved. The pandemic, together with delays caused by outstanding National Referral Mechanism (NRM) decisions have, as expected, continued to have an impact on the timeliness of conclusive grounds decisions. Alongside this, the shifting political landscape of asylum seeking in the UK including the Nationality and Borders Act (April 2022) and the Rwanda Asylum Policy continues to have a detrimental impact on asylum seeking and former asylum young people.

Following our successful restructure of the Onwards and Upwards Services in April 2022 including establishing the dedicated UASC team, we looked to address other areas of pressure and challenge within our service delivery, identifying young people aged 16 and 17, entering the care system as older adolescent with a history of trauma and neglect, who quickly journey through the care system, becoming vulnerable care experienced young people in need of significant support and guidance to navigate adulthood. In April 2023 we launched the 'Through Care Team' as a pilot team looking to provide longer-term social work support to these young people and providing robust multi-agency pathway planning to support them through their transition to adulthood. The team was paused in

December 2023 in the main due to a challenge in the recruitment of staff with the necessary skills to manage these young people’s needs. A thorough review and analysis into transitions for young people 16 and 17 is scheduled to take place later in 2024 to inform future service planning and delivery.

A revised audit program continues with ongoing specific focus on the pathway for over 18 care experienced young adults enabling all managers in the service to participate in auditing and embedding good practice across the teams.

The refurbishment project of the Woodhouse Road centre building commenced at the start of 2023, to improve service provision to young people provided by staff and partner organisations as we all returned to office-based working and delivery of face to face services. Throughout the year, young adults continue to be seen at the Leaving Care hub at Woodhouse Road, in community or in their homes, maintaining the vital connection of relationship between the young person and their personal advisor with 98% of young people seen within timescales (see Table). This remains a steady number in comparison to 2022/2023.



We launched the Empower21+ project, offering support, advice and guidance to Barnet care experienced young adults when requested, extending the 20+ Progression and Resource Forum. These pathways allow practitioners to consider the needs of care experienced young adults as they approach 21 years of age bringing together key professionals to consider how best they can support young adults who may be transitioning from the one-to-one service to duty-based support and/or to universal services, or in some cases, on to Adults Social Care support and/or other specialist provision.

Alongside this, in the summer we launched the ‘service for life’ offer within our revised and an updated Local Offer. The new policy to offer care experienced people a ‘service for life’ is actively supported by Barnet Council’s dedicated teams at the Onwards and Upwards Young People’s Centre. Unusually

for a London borough, Barnet has its own dedicated residential building, a safe space and a learning environment where care experienced people can drop in for help, support or just to say hello.

Case Study:

*One of our care experienced young people, aged 34, recently returned to the service for support in completing her application for a replacement passport. Another young person aged 26 recently visited Onwards and Upwards to share that she had recently had a baby and to invite the team to visit her and her new baby son at home. We also supported her to apply for a passport for her baby.*

*A care experienced parent, experiencing the very difficult situation of being part of legal proceedings in relation to her child had, as part of the Local Authority's care plan, the provision of corporate grandparent support included. This is life-long, informal support for the care experienced parent to be able to access parenting advice, or just a 'listening ear' to support safe parenting. This support has enabled her child to return to her care.*

Across the year we developed and progressed our Corporate Parenting Parent and Grandparent Pledge, confirming our commitment to support care experienced parents and their children. Our pledge confirms our commitment as a local authority to recognise the additional challenges care experienced parents experience and outlines the pathways through which we will work as one system to support both the parent and the child across Family Services. This includes support available through the Early Years program, specialised therapeutic assessment and support provided by Barnet's Parenting Hub and an assurance to work in partnership with the Assessment and Intervention service, when child protection concerns develop and care proceedings are issued. As part of our commitment to supporting parents and in partnership with Barnet Homes we have also ensured that care leaver parents are entitled to access a 2-bedroom property to provide adequate space for them and their child, regardless of the child's age. This offer was formally published in parallel with the Care Leaver Housing Panel in summer 2023.

*Being a parent can be a wonderful experience, however it is also really hard. We recognise that being care experienced and being a parent can bring extra challenges. As your corporate family, we want to support you to be the best parent that you can be. The **Barnet Care Leaver Parenting Pledge** has been co-created with care experienced parents. The pledge is our corporate parenting commitment to support you as a parent to be, or a parent who is looked-after or in the process of leaving care. We know that becoming a parent is not easy for any of us, and no one should have to do it alone. At the heart Barnet's Care leaver parenting pledge is the commitment that we, your corporate parent, and we are here to support you in becoming the best parent you can be.*

Following feedback from practitioners and professionals, we amalgamated the high-risk case forum (HRCF) and the Serious Adult Violence (SAV) panel, launching the Adults at Risk Panel in summer 2023. The panel brings together multi-agency partners from safeguarding, health, probation and community safety to look at supporting existing rehabilitative care and control plans in place. Young people reviewed through panel mechanism including those at risk of the following:



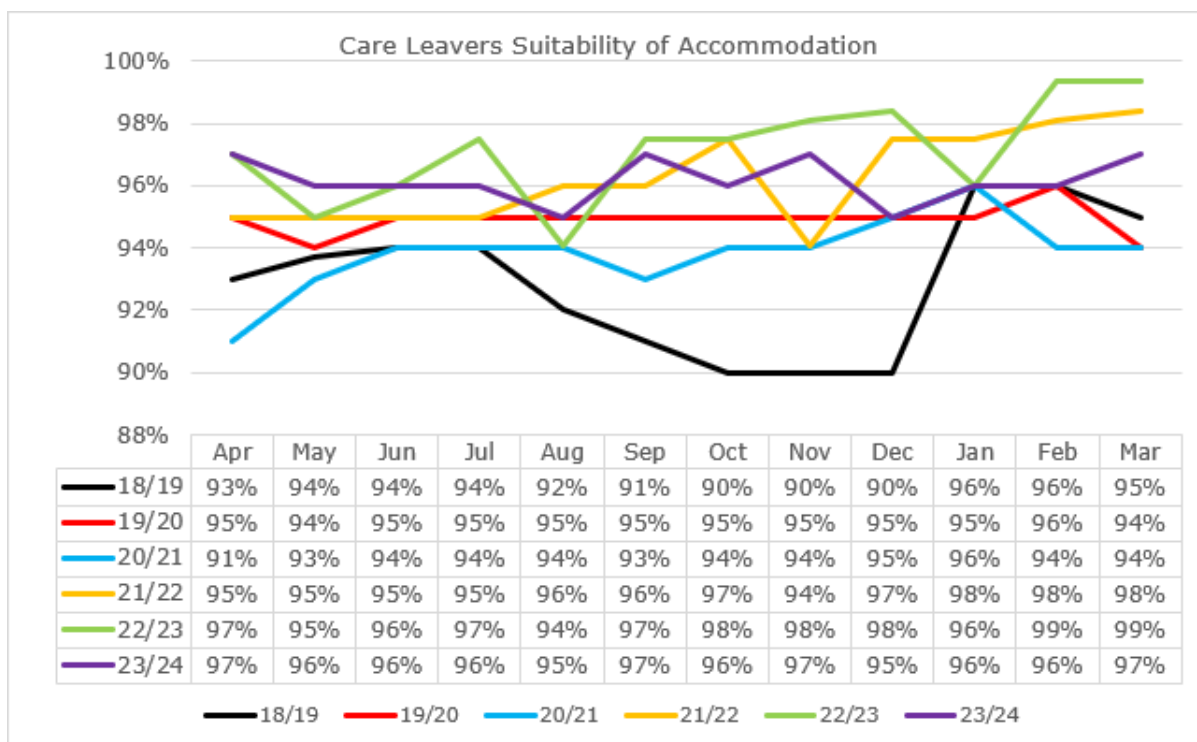
- Criminal exploitation- Including victims of cuckooing
- Involved in weapons based offending
- Involved in group/ gang offending
- Causing/affected by harm.
- Assessed by referrer as on the periphery of the above

The Expert by Experience role continues to progress from strength to strength over the past two years. With a new worker in post, the remit of the role has extended beyond co-facilitating the Strengths and Resilience group and supporting the development of a peer support group for care experienced parents. The role now includes organising social events and meetups for care experienced adults in response to the concerns for social isolation, low motivation and poor mental health, and supporting the celebration events and outreach trips to Thorpe Park and Go Ape.

The annual summer BBQ once again took place in August and was another great success, attended by many young people who enjoyed the food and music, alongside the dancing. We also celebrated with EID and Diwali events and the regular Christmas Party in December. Alongside the celebration events, we have also launched a series of Getting to Know you events for young people aged 16 and 17 ahead of their transition to adulthood. The aim of these events is to reduce the uncertainty and worry around becoming an adult and breaking down the stigma that young people will be left unsupported once they 'leave' care. Our ethos remains that young people with care experience will always be entitled to access support and services from their corporate parent, as confirmed in our Life Long Offer.

## Housing

Our care experienced young adults have previously told us that some of the semi-independent providers have not prepared them sufficiently for the future and in response we have strengthened our partnership work with Barnet Homes, refreshing our Care Leaver Joint Housing Protocol with Barnet Homes confirming expanding the second chance offer ensuring no care experienced young person can be found intentionally homeless and embedding the Council Tax exemption for all care leavers up to the age of 25.

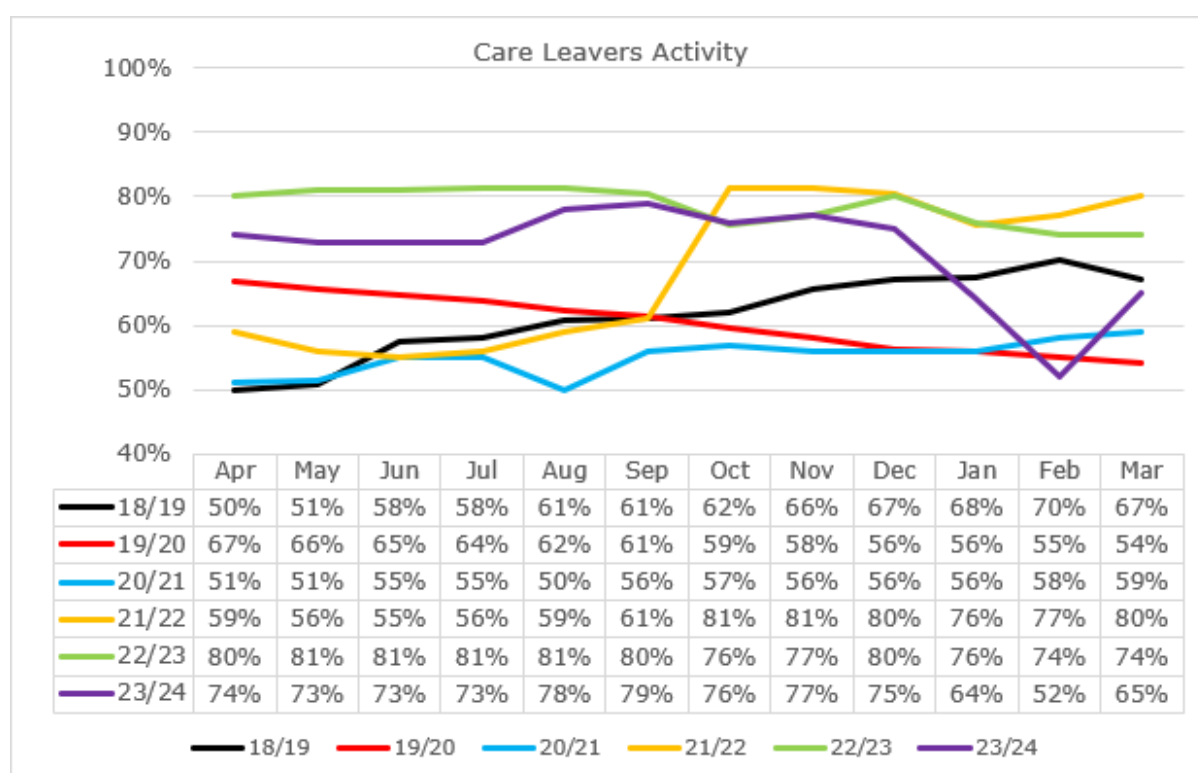


The majority of 17- 18 year olds (577%) and of 19-21 year olds (82%) of our care experienced adults continue to live independently. This is a positive trajectory showing that young people are living in accommodation that meets their needs, and that proactive care planning is now undertaken with young people approaching their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. We have continued the floating support offer introduced in 2020, providing additional support for the minority of young people requiring this to ensure a successful and smooth transition to independent living.

A small number of young people continue to remain living in their child in care arrangement post 18, reflecting both their level of need and the reduced availability of suitable properties in the housing market. As a direct consequence of the cost of living crisis and accommodation insufficiency across Barnet, there has been, in some instances, a lack of appropriate housing for young people assessed as ready to move into their independent property. Social Workers and Personal Advisors continue to advocate for these young people and strong partnership work between Onwards and Upwards has seen creative solutions to addressing and supporting young people’s housing needs. Almost all care experienced young adults are living in suitable accommodation (97%), a slight increase from 96% in 2021/2022. Staying put remains a positive accommodation arrangement for some with 9 care experienced young adults remaining with their former foster carer, a slight decrease from previous years. As part of our fostering recruitment strategy, we have recruited a number of supported lodgings hosts and now are able to offer support lodging accommodation with a host who will aid their transition to independent living in their own tenancy. As at 7<sup>th</sup> April 2024, there were 7 care experienced young adults living in this care arrangement double (7) the number of young people living in the arrangement in 2022/2023.

## Education, employment, and training

The percentage of care experienced young adults who were accessing Employment, Education and Training remained steady at 74% throughout most of the year, dipping to 52% in February, however increasing to 64% in March. Throughout the year, Barnet continued to fund the Care Leavers Project through the 16+ service within Family Services, with multiple projects focussing on enabling care leavers to move into education, employment, and training opportunities. Despite the challenges as we emerged from periods of lockdown restrictions and social distancing, intervention and support continued to be available to care experienced young adults through the ongoing partnership with Barnet Education and Learning Service (BELS).



The Bridging the Gap course continued to successfully run throughout the year offering training opportunities for young people to gain access into education and employment. Alongside this, the RON project was launched in early 2021, seeking to provide mentoring support underpinned by principles of life coaching to NEET young people aged 16-19 including care leavers. This follows the identified barrier for longer-term NEET young people being a lack of confidence something we aim to reduce for our care experienced young adults as a good corporate parent.

- 41 young people returned to education.
- 49 young people commenced employment, 25 of whom remained employed after 3 months

## Emotional Wellbeing of our Children in Care and Care Leavers

Barnet Integrated Clinical Services (BICS) works with children, young people, and families in schools, in the community (e.g., libraries, youth centres, children’s centres, GP surgeries, home) and within social care and youth justice services, to promote mental health, wellbeing and resilience.

BICS offers a range of evidenced-based therapy to children, young people and their families through individual therapy, family therapy, groups, and workshops. BICS also produces free online podcasts, workshops and learning resources on mental health and wellbeing. BICS Practitioners are embedded in social care teams providing consultation, group supervision and training to social workers including recent training on working with self-harm.

Throughout the year, BICS practitioners have provided support to social workers and supervising social workers to think stability during period of instability in placement, providing therapeutic support to children living in placements in Barnet, including those in the childrens' homes, and providing systemic supervision for social workers and practitioners to inform care planning and thinking about children and their individual circumstances and needs. The team have also provided group supervision for practitioners working with care experienced parents through our partnership work with the Parenting Hub. Feedback from practitioners is that this support has been invaluable in mentalising young people's experiences and providing appropriate support and guidance to them during periods of challenge and intensity.

Terapia continued to offer 1:1 counselling support to young people and care experienced adults. Given the increasing challenges of living through a global pandemic in social isolation, the support offer from Terapia was increased to ensure more young people are able to access the service in 2023/2024. Young people were referred for multiple presenting needs, including relationship issues, anxiety / stress and depression being the most notable recognised needs, following by difficulties with managing anger and processing experiences of trauma and abuse.