

CORPORATE PARENTING Annual Report 2020-21



FOREWORD

Our corporate parenting annual report seeks to inform the children and young people in our care or who have experienced being in care and our partner agencies about the progress and outcomes achieved over the last year. Never before have any of us experienced the challenges and changes that the last year has brought our way.

I am extremely proud of our children and young people who have showed great resilience, and say thank you to all who care for our children and young people who persevered, taught them at home and kept them safe, and to all the professionals that had to adapt to new ways of working with our children and young people and managed to maintain those important and precious relationships under tough circumstances.

Brigitte Jordaan,
Director of Corporate Parenting



Photo by Caleb Oquendo from Pexels

INTRODUCTION

In April 2020, we entered into the Covid-19 global pandemic. We very quickly shifted our thinking and planning to respond to the need to establish a new way of working that has, throughout the year, become embedded in our practice.

This year has been unprecedented and without a blueprint for how to deliver services to ensure children, young adults continued to feel held, supported and achieving as they lived through periods of home schooling, isolated from friends and activities that previously kept them connected.

As a service, we efficiently and effectively adapted to the new ways of remote working to ensure children, young people and adults could safely remain in contact with their families and professionals virtually whilst also promoting direct contact where safe to do so, to ensure vulnerable children remained in connection with their families.

Covid-19 is widely recognised as being the single biggest issue facing the fabric of British life since the second world war. The Government directed lockdowns, while necessary to protect the health and well-being of society, have had widespread individual, social and economic impacts and considerable negative effects on health and well-being.

These challenges created an opportunity for Barnet Family Services to demonstrate resilience as being not only at the heart of everything we do, but embedded in our service delivery and relationship with children, young adults and families.

We shifted to remote and virtual working, ensuring children remained in their care arrangements with people who knew and cared for them, putting in additional resources and supports with our partners across the Council to ensure children continued learning and accessing education.

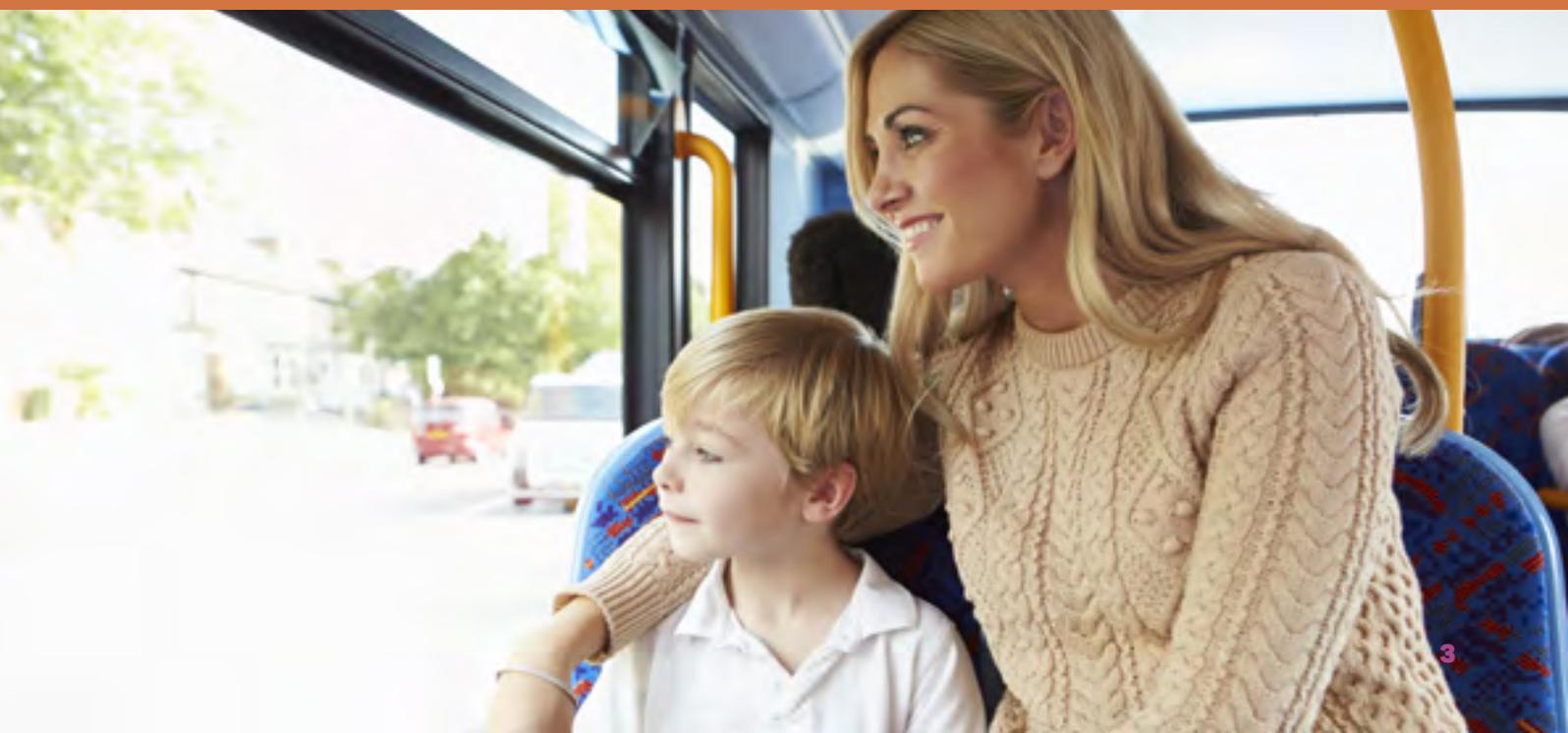
Children continued to see their families through telephone and video contact, as well as face to face contact continuing for children in care proceedings, and on occasions where it was appropriate and safe to do.

Care experienced young adults continued to be supported in the community by their workers, supporting them through period of isolation as the majority of services across the country and more widely across the world closed down.

Alongside the smooth transition to 'virtual relational social work', momentum continued in our journey to providing excellent services to our children, young people and their carers and families. Building on the key areas of focus identified in 2019-2020 following the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) in May 2019, we continued ensuring that children in our care remain central to all we do and plan.

We strengthened our advocacy offer to all children in our care, continued progressing our placement sufficiency offer so that children continue to move to the right care arrangement first time; strengthening children and young people's opportunities and educational outcomes through collaborative partnerships and innovation and ensuring we continue maximising opportunities and life chances for all care experienced young adults through dynamic partnership projects, with particular focus on education, employment or training and living independently with confidence.

At the start of 2021, we revised our Corporate Parenting Strategy to further our principles set out in our Children and Young People plan 2019 – 2023. In Barnet, we want the same things for our children and young adults as any good parent, that is, we want our children to be resilient, aspirational and independent. The Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out our promise to our children and young people and says:



WE WILL SUPPORT YOU TO FULFIL YOUR DREAMS

Throughout 2020/ 2021 we have:

- Focused on providing 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
- Children and young people have been supported virtually through a number of different avenues, and all children and young people have been supported with the provision of a laptop or tablet to ensure they have been able to participate in their education
- Developed the Transition Hub within the Virtual School that offers additional support as you move into your new home. During 2020 this hub worked flexibly to support young people who were unable to attend school and extended their remit to respond to the impact of the pandemic. 15 students were supported, 4 with in-reach support and 11 with outreach support
- Barnet Education, Employment and Training Support (BEETS) has continued to provide careers guidance, information and advice for young people in Barnet after leaving Year 11 until the age of 19 (or 25 for young people with statements/EHCP). Bridging the Gap and Thrive programs have continued to run throughout the pandemic and 75% of 17-18 year olds have remained in Education, Employment or Training
- Developed the Care Leavers Project, with multiple projects focusing on supporting you to move into further education, employment and training opportunities (EET).

WE WILL BE THERE FOR YOU, WHEN YOU NEED US

Over the past year, we have:

- Continued to be there and maintain positive relationships, supporting children and young people in navigating the continuously changing world through video calls and text messages, meeting them in the community and outside in gardens and public spaces and provided online forums for meet ups and celebrations
- Successfully maintained team work in a virtual world through continuing to focus on our relationships with each other as professionals, across different parts of the Council and with partners, working together with children, young people and care experienced young adults best interest in mind.
- Continued to provide safe and secure home environments for children, young people and adults through child-centred planning for care arrangements that take into consideration children and young people's views and wishes, including their cultural background, and relationships and connections in the local area
- Enhanced our placement offer to ensure children and young people are supported through 'rocky' periods and when they have a move that the right option is identified to avoid any further disruption
- Continued to offer support to foster carers and family carer to ensure the adults trusted to care for our children have the best support available to them to continue providing the warmth, care and love children and young need to thrive
- Worked together 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. We are also piloting 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
- Repurposed our children's home to better meet the needs of young people ensuring that wherever possible children can be cared for within their community even when needs are complex. Recruited more foster carers (16) to ensure children and young people can remain local to their homes and communities, attending their school and maintaining their relationships with friends and family.

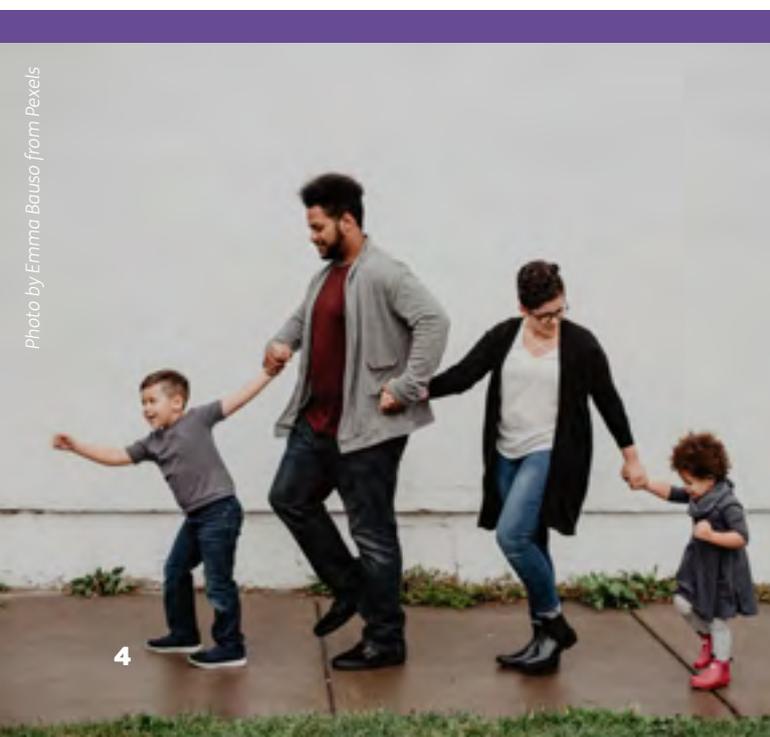


Photo by Emma Bauso from Pexels

WE WILL SUPPORT YOUR MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

Throughout 2020/ 2021 we have:

- Provided 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
- Developed our Special Educational Needs and Disability Strategy and our Autism Strategy to ensure that children who have additional needs are appropriately supported
- Refined the offer of mental health support for care leavers and provided additional therapists to ensure that those most in need had the support they required to manage living through a global pandemic
- Strengthened our offer of mental and physical health support to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children through specialised offers of mental health and physical health.

WE WILL LISTEN, COMMUNICATE AND MAKE DECISIONS TOGETHER WITH YOU

Throughout 2020/ 2021 we have:

- › Enhanced our commitment to 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 26 children and young people to return to care arrangements with their birth family
- › We have continued to meet with children, young people and care experienced adults virtually and in person, ensuring the significant relationship with social worker and/or personal advisors remained strong and supportive to those who needed it most throughout the year
- › 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 reflected
- › Feedback loops with children, young people and care experienced adults were developed in co-producing the revised Corporate Parenting Strategy 2019-2023 ensuring that voice of young people remains central to our corporate commitment to achieving an excellent service
- › We have provided an improved advocacy service as part of the Ofsted recommendation, and seen an increase in children and young people accessing this service
- › Continued to offer a virtual children in care council (Barnet on Point - #BOP) and where possible arranged meetings in the community
- › Commissioned the Bright Spots Program to deliver our Children in Care and Care Leavers survey for 2021/22
- › Developed 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, primarily delivered online and co-facilitated by the participation officer / expert by experience.

WE WILL SUPPORT YOU TO BECOME INDEPENDENT AND PREPARE FOR ADULTHOOD

Throughout 2020/21 we have:

- › Continued to promote Staying Put and Support Lodgings care arrangements with 28 young people remaining living with their former foster carer and a further 6 young people living with supported lodgings hosts
- › Implemented the Moving Forward Projects; shared living spaces for young people as stepping-stone accommodation to independent living
- › Developed the independent living project 'We Built This Home'; a series of workshops that will support independent living skills through both practical skills training alongside health, personal care, nutrition, cooking, budgeting and finance
- › Promoted the Barnet Supported Living Service helping young people with disabilities to lives as independently as possible in their own home





- Continued to provide financial education to 15-17 years through the Step-Ladder program
- Promoted health passports for all care experienced young adults to ensure they have access to their health histories to support them in their adult years
- Maintained a commitment to ensuring all young people have a bank account and access to their savings upon their 18th birthday
- Progressed partnership working with Barnet homes to ensure that all young people aged 17 are supported with housing nomination forms to assist their transition to independent living upon their 18th birthday or when they are appropriately ready
- Increased our offer to provide direct housing offers to young people in partnership with Barnet homes to 67 young people, up from a target of 48
- Raised the need for more housing for care experienced young adults with the Housing & Growth Committee and obtained agreement for Barnet Homes to acquire 30 units for our young adults
- Maintained the services of a designated work coach in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions who has continued to offer services remotely, and when possible at Woodhouse Road
- Provided driving lessons to 6 young people through our partnership work with charity, Live Unlimited and supported a further 3 young people with their learner's permit
- In partnership with BEETS Barnet Education, Employment and Training Service, we supported 38 young people in further education, employment and training; between September 2019 and March 2021, there has been a 54% increase in participation of former NEET (not in education, employment or training) through our partnership work with Barnet Education and Learning Service - BELS)
- We also continued to run the Bridging the Gap and RON courses both virtually and face to face throughout the year, continuing to support young people accessing apprenticeships, employment and training
- Maintained an average of 55.25% of care experienced young adults remaining in education, employment and training, despite the significant hardship young people aged 18-24 were experiencing on account of COVID-19. There was an increase in those claiming benefits in Barnet (up from 2.5% in 2019 to 9.5% in July 2020) and young people more likely to be furloughed.

WE WILL CELEBRATE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE, THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS, IDENTITY AND CULTURE SUPPORT THEIR MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

Over the past year, we have:

- › Provided additional support to foster carers and residential workers to ensure that they have the skills and confidence to help children and young people discuss and explore their reflections and responses to the Black Lives Matter movement
- › Ensured safety planning for young people in the wake of Black Lives Matter protests
- › Continued to run our program of celebration activities through online programs, including celebrating National Children in Care Day in February 2021 and National Care Leavers Week in November 2020, along with a calendar of Christmas activities for care leavers and foster carers
- › Continued to ensure that children and young people's individual care plans acknowledge their difference and reflect their nationality, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, gender and disability
- › Developed the Anti-Racism Action Plan implemented across Family Services promoting a work environment that is committed to equality and diversity
- › Provided a training program supporting all staff and managers to develop the skills to have confident conversations about race to enable social workers and personal advisors to promote children and young people's life story through a racial and cultural lens with confidence and sensitivity
- › Continue to recruit foster carers from diverse backgrounds to support children and young people settling into their homes and feeling safe, secure and understood.



CHILDREN IN CARE PROFILE

Children leaving their family homes and coming into the care of Barnet family services do so for a number of different reasons, however for the majority of these young people, it is on account of abuse and neglect.

At the end of March 2021, Barnet had 327 children and young people in their care. On 8 April 2021, 36% of looked after children were in care of account of abuse and neglect a similar figure to 2019-20, however there was a significant increase for children coming into care because absent parenting (28%) and family dysfunction (26%).

On the 8 April 2021, 36% 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 24% of children were subject to Interim Care Orders with their care arrangements continuing to be determined by the Courts. Despite the Family Court also moving to remote working there were some delays with the progression of final hearings and outcomes being determined for children, particularly when adoption was the recommendation resulting in fewer changes to the care arrangements for children and young people during 2020/21.

Continuing with our resilience-based approach social work practice in 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 (April 2020 - March 2021), Barnet Family Services entered care proceedings in respect of 82 children, a significant difference from the 138 children who were subject to care proceedings the previous year. Of these 82 children, care proceedings concluded for half (41 children) in an average of 37 weeks, two weeks less than in 2019/2020. The remaining 41 children's care proceedings were not concluded in this reporting period.

For the children whose care proceedings did conclude and who have achieved permanence in their care arrangements, the following was observed:

- 25 children (61%) achieved permanence through alternative care arrangements outside of the care of their birth parents
 - 8 children (20%) achieved care plans of adoption through the granting of a placement order
 - 6 children (14%) primarily older children became 'looked after' with a care plan of long term fostering
 - 11 children (27%) were placed in the care of their wider families by virtual of Special Guardianship orders.
- 16 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
 - 11 children (27%) were returned home to the care of their parents under a Supervision Order
 - 5 children (12%) were returned home to their families under No Order.

This reduction was attributed to a significant reduction in referrals with schools closed and families living in lockdown, and children not coming to the attention of professionals.

Throughout the year, Barnet has seen a dramatic increase in number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) coming into care (see below table). At the end of March 2021, 71 of our children in care were UASC, a 58% increase from 2017 when there were only 45 UASC in the care of Barnet. This significant increase is the result of world events leading children and young people to flee their homes and families travelling to Europe and United Kingdom through various means seeking safety and a place to call home.

This year the Home Office acquired 4 hotels within Barnet to use as dispersal accommodation for asylum seeking families and single adults. From these hotels, Barnet has received 45 referrals in the last 12 months from solicitors and charities acting on behalf of young people who claim they have been wrongly identified by the Home Office as adults and are in fact children seeking asylum. Age assessments have concluded on half of these young people with 2 in 3 being determined as an adult, and returned to the Home Office for support and services as an adult asylum seeker.



CASE STUDY

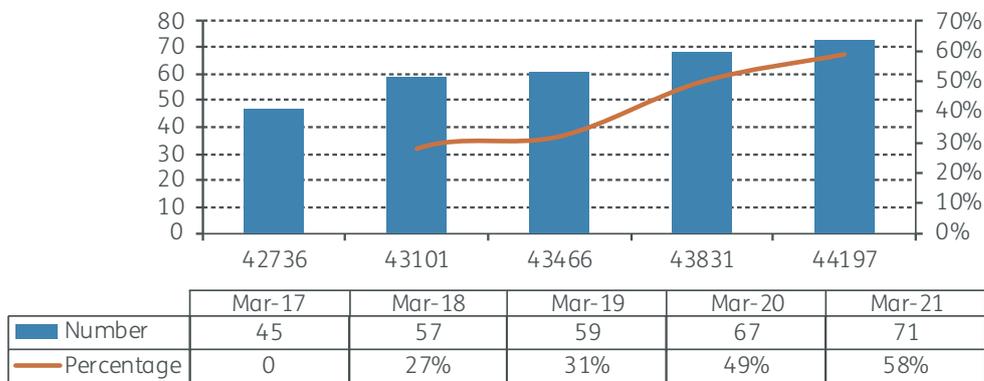
SALEEM'S STORY:

At the age of 14 Saleem's circumstances in his home country of Sudan changed and he and his family no longer felt safe. He began his long, frightening 7-month journey separated from his family to England where he was told he would be safe and could be happy.

Saleem overcame many challenges along the way and even when arriving in England challenges remained. He needed to let authorities know he was here and that he was a child, however he didn't speak English or know anyone. He was scared and did not know where he would end up. Saleem was taken to a foster family with 2 other Unaccompanied children.

Saleem is now 19 years old, he speaks great English and is studying at university. He remains with his foster family under a staying put arrangement. With the support of this foster family, Social Worker and later his Personal Advisor in the Leaving Care Service Saleem has learnt to feel safe and cared for again. He continues to receive support to help with his past trauma, unique to UASCs as a result of their difficult journey and experiences en route to the UK, and support from his Personal Advisor for his asylum application and housing. Now when you ask Saleem to describe himself it is clear that he remains impacted by traumatic events, but he says he is happy, he feels he belongs and is grateful for the support and compassion of everyone who supports him.

Increase in UASC Population March 17 to March 21



Looked After at 31 March 2021		LAC	UASC	Total
Gender	Male	48%	99%	59%
	Female	52%	1%	41%
Ethnicity	Any Other Ethnicity	6%	51%	16%
	Asian	5%	15%	7%
	Black	18%	24%	19%
	Gypsy/Roma	0%	0%	0%
	Mixed	25%	0%	19%
	White	46%	6%	37%
	Not Stated	0%	4%	2%
Age on Starting Care	0 to 10	64%	3%	50%
	11 to 13	11%	18%	12%
	14 to 15	13%	33%	17%
	16 to 17	12%	46%	20%
Totals		255	72	327

Barnet has continued to have a stable figure of children coming into care. We had 327 children in care on 31 March 2021, a direct mirror of the 327 children in care in 2020, and slightly higher than in 2019 which was 312 children.

The following table represents our cohort of children in the care (327) as at 31 March 2021.

There is little change to the general cohort of looked after children coming into the care of Local Authority during the year, despite such significant changes taking place across the world.

The only factor of any significant is a decrease in children aged 0 – 10 coming into care down from 67% in 2019/20 to 64% and an increase in young people aged 16-17 coming into care up 12% from 7%.

This is likely due to a decrease in referrals from the early years provision and schools on account of closures and lockdown restrictions, whilst older children, aged 16 -17 struggled in the care of their parents and sought assistance and support outside of their family network. 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.

Their needs tend to be young person centred, with mental health often underlying issues. In many cases there have been missing episodes and some substance misuse, and in some cases child sexual exploitation.



PLACEMENT SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY

Our placement demand transformation continues to be underpinned by progressing our in-house offer for foster carers and supported lodgings hosts.

Foster care continues to be our preferred placement option, with the majority of our children continuing to be placed in foster care (172 children /53%).

Wherever possible, kinship foster care is considered with 9% (30) of children living in foster care are with extended family member such as grandparents or aunt and uncles. If this is not an option, the first choice is always for children to be placed with internal foster carers; Barnet has 95 foster carers with provide a home for 90 (28%) of our children.

This is up slightly from 2019/20, and evidences the robust marketing and successful recruitment of carers continuing throughout the pandemic.

The below table outlines the breakdown of placements for children in Barnet as at 31 March 2021.

Placement type at 31 March 2021	Number	%
Internal		
LBB Fostering	90	28%
Connected Persons (kinship)	30	9%
Placed for Adoption	4	1%
Internal Residential	7	2%
Parental	6	2%
All Internal	137	42%
External		
Agency Fostering	82	25%
Semi Independence	68	21%
External Residential	36	11%
Secure/YOI	4	1%
All External	190	58%
Overall Total	327	100%

Despite the significant challenges of recruiting foster carers throughout a global pandemic, our recruitment drive remained strong. We quickly moved from outreach events to online recruitment using social media platforms including Facebook and Instagram.

Our recruitment strategy has benefitted from this flexibility, continuing to provide an effective and aspirational high-quality campaign at best value to meet the needs of children in the care of the London Borough of Barnet.

Through our creative and dynamic use of Facebook live events and Instagram stories we successful recruited 11 fostering households this year. We further recruited 6 supported lodgings hosts to best meet the needs of the older children coming into care requiring support with their independent living skills whilst remaining in the warm environment of a family home.

In 2019, we developed our placement sufficiency strategy (2019 – 2023) designed to ensure we could meet the needs of children and young people coming into care through providing them with the best possible alternate care arrangements outside of their families. This included a particular focus on culturally diverse foster carers, supported lodgings hosts and semi-independent provisions.

Our aim continues to be:

- Replace our current foster carers as they retire or resign from the service. 35% (33) of our foster carers are aged 60 and over
- Increase the number of foster carers (+35 over the next financial year) and therefore reduce the number of children placed in Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA). This will enable more children and young people to remain local to their family, friends and school
- Increase the number of support lodgings hosts (+15 over the next 2 financial years). This will continue to create an alternate option for 16+ young people allowing them to develop the necessary skills to live independently as adults. Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) will be the focus of this care arrangement, as this will ensure they can remain in one home throughout their time in care and support their integration into British society
- To continue to meet the needs of children with complex needs, we have specifically aimed our recruitment strategy at people with experience in relevant professions, such as nursing, police and education. This has the potential to offer family based options for our emotionally complex children and can be a step-down from our therapeutic children's home, Green Bank House
- Offering a respite option for carers that will enable them to manage the demands and needs of our most complex children and young people .

We have continued our focus on pathway planning and careful matching, developing our 'Who We Place Where' protocol confirming our commitment to placement stability and ensuring we aim to have the right care arrangement for a child the first time.

CASE STUDY

ROMAN'S STORY:

Roman is a 17-year-old child who came into care when he was 15 years old. He is now in his third placement. He was initially placed with foster carers in an emergency and then moved to more suitable foster carers who were identified to best meet his needs. Unfortunately, Roman found it difficult to settle in foster care and expressed a wish to be cared for by family friends. Following a period of assessment and extended contact, the family friends were approved as connected carers for Roman and he moved to live with them where he has been able to settle and considers this to be his home and the carer, his family.

The large majority of children and young people (241 children, 74%) remained in their same home throughout the year. Mostly due to Covid-19 lockdowns placement stability remained strong throughout the first half of the year and into summer, with some instability occurring in October – December 2020, at the time when there were frequent changes in lockdown restrictions and school openings and closure.

Foster carers, their families and the looked after children and young people continued to demonstrate great resilience throughout the year, and for many families, the opportunity of living in isolation provided opportunities for improved relationships. Some carers spoke about spending more quality time together as a family, taking walks outside and playing games, children spoke about learning to garden and improving their cooking skills and young people shared experiences of becoming closer with their carers or improving in their schoolwork without the distraction of peers in a classroom.

29 children experienced 3 or more placement moves throughout the year, down from 39 in 2019/20 and 37 in 2019/18. Most children who did experience 3 or more placement moves can be categorised into three cohorts, those coming new into care in a crisis, those experiencing an unplanned move because their escalating needs, and those moving back to within their birth family.

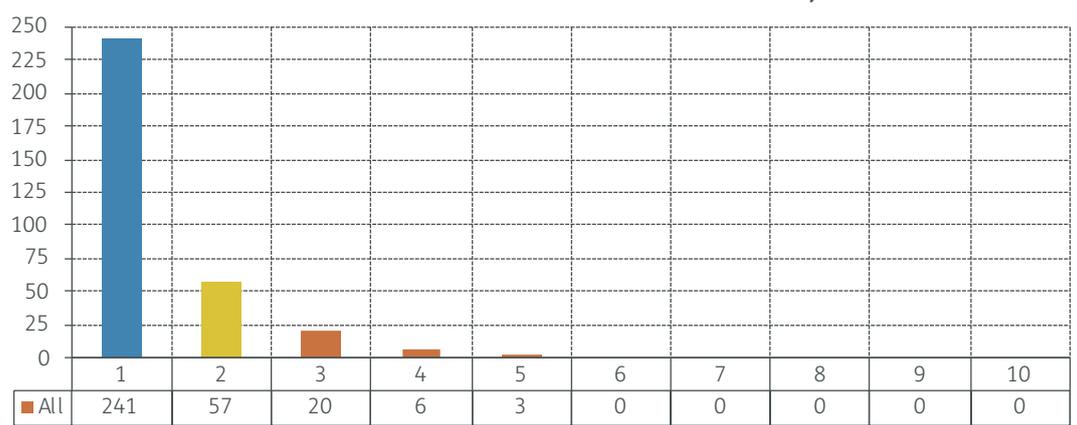
We recognise that children and young people need stability and permanency in their lives and to know their care arrangement is the right home for them. As part of our 'Who we place where' protocol, all children and young people who move placements are now routinely reviewed within our permanency tracking 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 changing developmental stages.



The table below outlines the number of moves children and young people experienced during 2020/2021.

Frequency of Number of Placements of Looked After Children as at March 31st, 2021



CARE LEAVERS:

...for many care leavers COVID-19 has only served to increase the challenges that they routinely have to face in more normal times. Consider for example, the serious and justifiable concerns for the employment prospects of young people across the country in post-pandemic job market. In 2019 care leavers aged 19 to 21 were more than three times more likely to be NEET (not engaged in employment, education or training) than their peers. It’s an unsettling comparison, rendered still more stark by the current crises.

Think too about the lockdown and continued restrictions may have affected care leavers...a high number of care leavers don’t always feel safe where they live. Feelings of isolation and loneliness for much of the wider population during this year’s restrictions are nothing new for many care leaver. As many as 1 in 5 care leavers have reported often or always feeling lonely...

Yvette Stanley, Ofsted social care blog during National Care Leavers Week in October 2020

During 2020/21 the number of care leavers continued to increase month on month. On 31 March 2021 Barnet had 357 care leavers, a third of whom (120) were former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

Most of our care leavers are aged between 18 - 20 year olds (232; 65%) with 17% (61) aged 21 years old and 18% (64) 22 years or older. This is a shift from 2019/20 where 232 care experienced adults, 125 less than this year, received a service from the Onwards and Upwards service. Typically, the majority of our cohort of care experienced young people were aged 18 – 21 (238 young adults, 74%); 12% (39) were 21-year olds and 14% (46) were aged over 22 years or older.

This changing picture of more young adults accessing the service reflects the incredibly difficult year young people aged 18 – 25 have experienced across the UK, leaving them in need of additional supports and services. These shifts are also attributable in-part to the increased former UASC cohort, who continue to receive support from the Leaving Care service at least until their asylum application has been resolved.

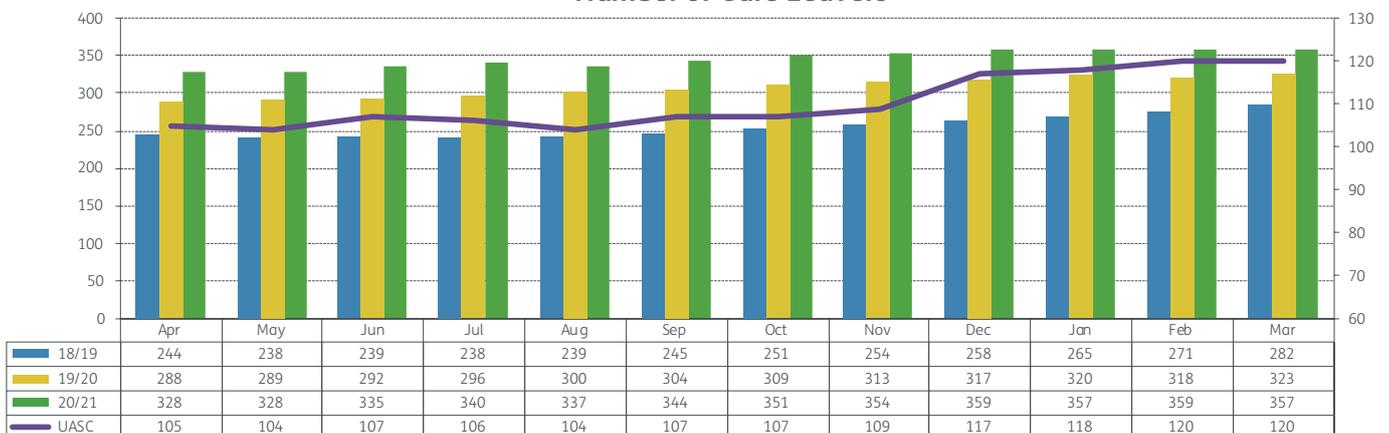
The pandemic, together with delays caused by outstanding National Referral Mechanism (NRM) decisions have and are expected to continue having an impact on the timeliness of conclusive grounds decisions.

However more broadly, this changing picture also reflects the incredibly difficult year young adults aged 18 – 25 have experienced across the UK. **See below table.**

Due to their struggles with digital poverty, financial hardship, loneliness, anxiety and fear, many care experienced young people had few people within their networks they could reliably turn to for support. Personal Advisors were for some, their only form of connection to the wider world at points during the lockdown.

Care leavers who, previously would have been independent and self-sufficient enough to manage with the prospect of a job, employment, education or an active social life were unable to progress living independently without their backup of the leaving care service.

Number of Care Leavers



As illustrated in the following quote from a Barnet Care Leaver:

PERSONAL ADVISOR:

...has offered me all forms of support during the most critical period of my life and couldn't ask for anyone better. During the pandemic, she has shown me the lengths that she would go to make sure my sisters and I were stable.

In 2020, she helped me with my money problems when I lost my job, supported me in getting housing, found an apprenticeship in a field that I wouldn't have known about, AND I got a chance to join a competition for free driving lessons, which I won. 2020 was a tough year but she made sure I remained positive and was working towards my future. I hope to make her proud.

The Leaving Care building has remained open throughout the entirety of the pandemic. Staff were available every day at the Centre to meet young people by appointment. Their on-site foodbank provision was expanded to operate a limited delivery service where possible, for those young people unable to travel.

As restrictions have eased, we have developed a number of innovations to better support our young people to prepare for independence, including the We Built this Home project and are setting out the plans to create an offer for our 21 – 25 year old care experienced adults who continue to need support in their journey to independent living.

We have increased our offer of clinical support with partner agency Terepia to ensure that all those in need have access to high quality therapeutic and clinical intervention. The high-risk case forum continued to be held virtually throughout the year, allowing personal advisors to produce pathway plans that best support the needs of the most complex young people with packages of support from partner agencies.

In January 2020, we recruited an Expert by Experience to join the service. Her role encompassed advice and consultancy on all matters related to care experience, including as part Foster Carer recruitment and training. Within the Leaving Care Service, she has co-facilitated the Strengths and Resilience group, enabling this to continue its important role of extra familial support.

She has also developed a peer support group for care experienced parents. Care experienced parents can be uniquely vulnerable, underpinned by a group of practitioners completing Parent Assess training this year, our aspiration is for the group to develop as a peer support space for care leaver parents, offering practical and emotional support.

We have worked in partnership with our Barnet's care leaver charity Live Unlimited to provide dongles and tablets/laptops for care experienced adults throughout the year, ensuring that they could remain connected to their families and friends through the wider, virtual world.

Throughout the year Onwards and Upwards continued to provide virtual celebration and social events in recognition of the challenges of supporting people to come together during periods of restriction.

This includes virtual events celebrating Care Leavers fortnight, Black History Month, Christmas and Carers Remembrance Day. The Strength and Resilience group continued throughout the year mostly virtually, co-facilitated by the Expert by Experience practitioner.

Additional sub-groups from the Strengths and Resilience group, including the parents group and the groups specifically for Vietnamese care experienced young adults were also facilitated by the service on as and when basis, and in response to the changing needs of the service users.



CARE LEAVERS: 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. In 2019-2020 we reviewed our provisions and began developing alternative accommodation offers for young people.

In July 2020, we opened the first of our Moving Forward provisions, a 4-bedroom shared living space in West Hendon with some targeted outreach support where young people can develop the necessary independent skills to allow them to successfully move into their own accommodation and maintain their tenancy. We are now in the process of opening the second Moving Forward provision to better meet the needs of our young people.

More than half of all care leavers now continue to live independently (59%), up from 43% in March 2018 and 44% in March 2019. These young people continue to receive support from their Personal Advisor to ensure their well-being and promote their transition to adulthood and independence.

This year we have also introduced the floating support offer on a needs basis for the minority of our young people that may need additional support for a limited time. For example, when they first move into their property or for additional support during a crisis or change in circumstance to ensure that they can remain within their tenancy.

Some young people remain in their children in care arrangement post 18 and prior to moving into their independent accommodation. Almost all care experienced young adults are living in suitable accommodation (97%). Staying put has been implemented with 28 (8%) care experienced young adults remaining with their former foster carer. We have progressed our staying put offer, informed by our recruitment strategy and now are able to offer support lodging accommodation with a host who will aid their transition to independent living in their own tenancy.

There are now 6 (2%) care experienced young adults living in this care arrangement, and intend to increase these number over the next year. Semi-independent accommodation continues to be our main offer of transition accommodation for 16+ year olds. This year, 60 (17%) care experienced adults live in semi-independent accommodation, up from 37 (11%) in March 2020.

The increase of young people remaining in their semi-independent accommodation is related to the decision not to move young people during lockdown to ensure they were safe and in familiar places of support given the known concern for young people living in isolation. However, as we move into 2021 with the easing of restrictions and a slow move back towards a familiar way of living, we are seeing an improving picture.



Our partnership work with Barnet Homes, including their review of the Care Leaver Housing Protocol in May 2021, resulted in an increase performance target to accommodate 56 care leavers in 2021/22, up from 48 in 2020/21. Additionally, Barnet Homes recognised the additional pressures placed on vulnerable young people living through a global pandemic and their need for security and stability in the face of a changing world.

They used their discretion to facilitate direct offers of accommodation due to exception circumstances for a further 19 care leavers, bringing the total to 67 care experienced young people who moved into their permanent accommodation during 2020/21.

We are now working with the Barnet Group to identify the most effective route to purchase 30 x 1 and 2-bedrooms units to be available in 2023 ensuring young people can move into their own properties when they are ready for independent living, and avoid the unnecessary time living in temporary accommodation.

In addition, we consulted with children and young people throughout the year on our revised Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021 – 2023 who shared their wish to live independently and learn ‘how to get my own home’. In response to this feedback, the ‘We Built this Home’ project will include modules in supporting young people to maintain a tenancy, bills and budgeting and taking care of your home with general repairs and maintenance. This project is expected to be launched in autumn 2021.

CARE LEAVERS: EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

2020 was a difficult and challenging year across the globe as Covid-19 not only has implications for our health and wellbeing but quickly became an economic crisis, with young people becoming disproportionately impacted.

Before COVID-19 the social and economic integration of young people was an ongoing challenge, however because of lockdowns and living in isolation, young people aged 18-25 are likely to suffer a severe and long-lasting impact to employment and training opportunity and adversely affecting their opportunities for financial stability and security.

The percentage of care experienced young adults who were accessing Employment, Education and Training remained steady at 55% throughout the year, showing an improving picture towards the end of year consistent with the easing of restrictions and the opening up of the economy.

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.

The project launched in September 2019 and by March 2021 there had been a 54% increase in participation of young people initially identified as not accessing Education, Employment or Training (EET).

Despite the challenges 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.

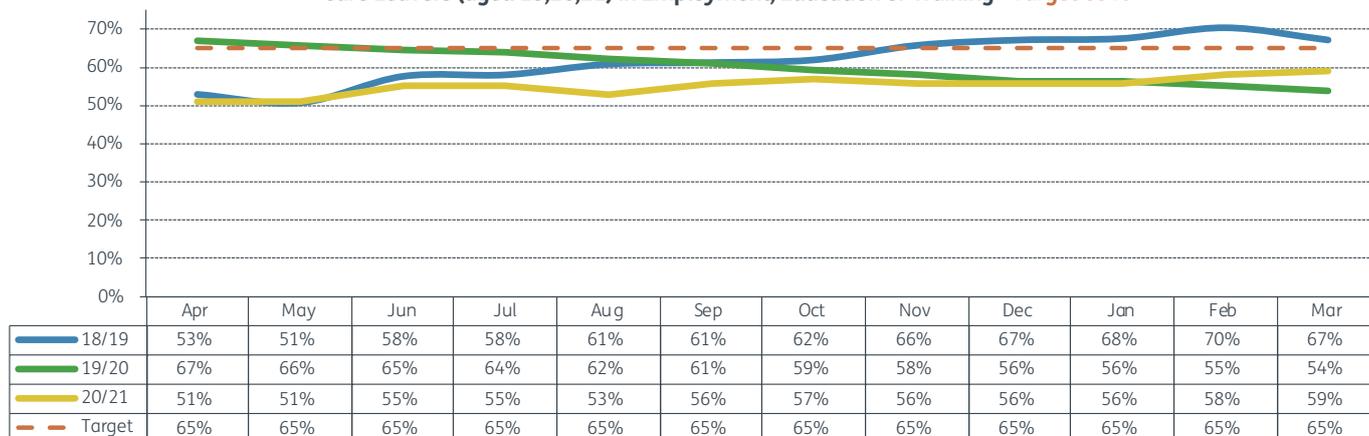
This follows the identified barrier for longer-term NEET young people being a lack of confidence, something we aim to reduce for our care leavers as a good corporate parent.

Barnet Education Learning Service has delivered the following key outcomes in 2020 -2021

- 17 young people participated in mentoring throughout the year
- 10 young people completed Bridging the Gap course
- 38 young people moved into Education, Employment or Training (Total of 63 for the 2 year Care Leavers Project from 2019-21).

New initiatives that commenced in 2020/21 include the Elevate mentoring program, with a number of new initiatives developed throughout the year to launch in 2021/22.

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



MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

Our relationships with the children in our care and care experienced young adults has continued to be key to our practice and intervention.

Social Workers and personal advisors continued to keep in contact with children and young people through the pandemic, through a combination of face-to-face visits when needed and where safe to do so utilising gardens, public spaces and on doorsteps, and combining this with virtual visits through video calls, online meeting platforms and text messages.

All children, young people and young adults' needs were assessed by their social worker or personal advisor at the start of the pandemic and RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rated to determine the level of visits and support required. This approach was informed by the revised guidance 'Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulation 2020' which provided flexibility to Local Authorities in their statutory duties, including visiting and reviewing timescales.

CANDICE'S STORY:

CASE STUDY

Candice is a 12-year-old child who has been looked after for three years. She is a very talented young person who is good at sports and art and receives prizes at school for her writing. Candice has a positive relationship with her Barnet foster carer and thrived during lockdown, working hard on her online learning.

Candice transitioned to secondary school during 2020, a challenging experience at any time but even more so when so much of school life was being undertaken online. She has managed this transition exceptionally well and has settled into her new school where she continues to achieve. During the last year, Candice was officially matched for the long-term with her carers, another significant milestone. She has a positive relationship with her social worker and carers and he has worked hard with them to be able to talk about her feelings. Candice's foster carer and social worker are extremely proud of her.

Alongside supporting children and young people through relational social work, we extended our offer of relational social work to our foster carers to better enable them to meet the needs of the children in their care. We quickly moved to online support and supervision for our carers, RAG rating them in response to level of need and support in consultation with the child's social worker. We reviewed all foster carers to ensure they had nominated carers to assist them should alternate care arrangements be required for the children in their care, and ensured that carers had access to the Personal Protective Equipment they needed to feel safe in their homes and in the community. Furthermore, we ensured that our internal foster carers had the necessary documentation identifying them as key workers to access protected shopping times and supported them with access to the Covid-10 vaccination program as a key worker in health and social care.

Our support to carers increased, offering additional support and supervision in line with their identified need, but also fortnightly skype coffee sessions with the fostering management team. These coffee mornings continued throughout much of 2020, offering space for carers to come together on a regular basis and engage in an open dialogue regarding how they were managing through lockdown with home schooling and periods of extended isolation. Black Lives Matter and Barnet's Anti-Racism strategy was a regular topic of discussion, supporting carers with the confidence to have open and honest conversations with young people in their care on their experiences of racism and oppression. Online training continued throughout the year for carers, alongside virtual events for Foster Care Fortnight 2020 and an award ceremony attended by the Mayor of Barnet and Lead Member for Children celebrating Foster Care Appreciation Day in October. The foster carer and children in care Christmas Party took place virtually with over 30 fostering households in attendance.

The Foster Carer Survey completed in December 2020 evidenced that 63% of carers felt good about being a foster carer for Barnet and were satisfied with the training offer currently provided virtually. The majority of carers described having a good relationship with their supervising social worker and felt supported, however many felt the out of hours support offer was poor. In response, we have developed our Out of Hours support offer which was launched in Foster Care Fortnight in 2021, providing evening support Monday – Sunday.



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.

There have been changes to the Virtual School with the appointment of Sarah Deale, the Head Teacher who came into post in April 2020. There has been little shift throughout the year in the demographics of children attending the virtual school as outlined in the table below.

There has been a slight increase in children from black and minoritized ethnic groups at 73%, up from 70% in 2019/20 and an increase in children accessing Special Educational needs, with 42 children (21.5%) up from 39 children (19.8%). The UASC cohort has significantly changed, as noted earlier in this report.



		2018/ 2019	2019/ 2020	2020/ 2021		
	Nursery		11	12		
	% of children SEN support			2		
	% of children with EHCPs			3		
Statutory age group	Statutory age	191	196	195		
	Reception		4	7		
	Key Stage 1		16	14		
	Key Stage 2		43	37		
	Key Stage 3		51	53		
	Key Stage 4		82	84		
	Boys/girls	111/80	113/83	109/86		
	% of children from ethnic minority groups		70.6%	73.3%		
	% of children SEN support		19.8% (39)	21.5% (42)		
	% of children with EHCPs			24.9% (49)	24.6% (48)	
				O/B	I/B	O/B
			33	16	30	18
		Number of UASC	18	25	35	
	Children without a school place		0	2		

Over the last year, the Virtual School caseworkers under the leadership of the Head Teacher adapted their working practices in response to Covid-19 pandemic and the changing impact on education for children and young people.

Despite these challenges with school closures for extended periods of time alongside various year closures with students isolating at home due to outbreaks, the team have continued to support the education of Barnet's looked after children effectively and with positive outcomes.

There was an increase in school attendance overall across the year, and all statutory aged children were offered places in school in the Spring Term 2021 with the take up better than in the Summer Term 2020.

EDUCATION / THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL

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

- Provision of laptops to enable remote learning, since September 2021 over 93 have been given to young people
- Tuition provided to all students in April 2020 for a fixed period to support whilst schools set up remote learning
- Home learning ideas given to foster carers and continued to be a children and young people's Personal Education Plans throughout the year
- Developed guides to support children with understanding coronavirus and return to school
- Enrichment opportunities continued to be provided with foster carers and young people encouraged to participate; this included:
 - Brunel Mentoring scheme for years 12/13 matching them with a care experienced mentor to support with high education
 - We are heroes' mini magazine giving children a creative way of processing the situations they find themselves in
 - Campfire Project Forest School supported through Live Unlimited
 - The letterbox club through the Book Trust providing a regular box of books to children in care to promote literacy and English
 - Pen pal project encouraging young people to remain in higher education through linking them up with care experienced university students
- Year 6/7 transition lead supported foster carers with creative approach using websites to see virtual tours, uniform, staff etc and provision of profile passports during first lockdown to support this transition despite restrictions with visiting schools
- Training sessions continued to be offered to foster carers, along with attendance at foster carer coffee mornings to ensure feedback loops continued
- Termly newsletter sent to foster carers providing useful resources and information to support with home education throughout the lockdown and half term activities along with well-being ideas given to foster carers.

Other initiatives supporting children and young people's education and independence throughout the year include The Stepladder Program: incentivised learning program through the Child Trust Fund, with 35 young people successfully registered and 5 full completions since August 2019.

Due to Covid-19 it is difficult to present the key data for 2019/20. The data that is available relates to Key Stage 4 and notes that Barnet is roughly in line with the national average (narrowly above in the Attainment 8 measure and narrowly below on the proportion of pupils attaining a four or above in English and Maths).

The rank in Attainment 8 between 2019 and 2020 improved from 99th in 2019 to 74th in 2020. Children and young people's personal education plans (PEPS) provide a more general overview of their progress, noting the following: 80% of young people were reported to be making good or better progress and 75% were reported to be at least engaged and motivated most of the time. 4 young people successfully moved into university education studying criminology, law, computer science and marketing management respectively.

In the context of significant challenges to young people and their education through the pandemic, the Virtual School post 16 caseworkers have continued to support 16 and 17 year old young people to continue in their education or in training and/or employment if that is their wish. In 2020, 39% of care leavers were NEET nationally, for Barnet, this figure is considerably lower at 22.9% with 4.8% of these are unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people who are relatively new into care.

The virtual school works closely with these young people to support their ongoing development and independence through the Bridging the Gap and RON courses. In addition, through work with the BEETS (Barnet Education, Employment and Training Service) apprenticeships in construction and motor vehicle have been of interest. One young person has successfully secured and started his apprenticeship with Galdris and is thoroughly enjoying it.

As we move into another new year in uncertain times, we will continue the need to change and adapt to meet the shifting circumstances and the needs of children and young people. However, this will also be an exciting time, for the Virtual School building on the successes of 2020/21 and continuing with innovating enrichment programs and holistic support offered to children, young people and their carers to achieve throughout the year.

Similar to last year, this year ended amid challenging times for everyone, the year ahead is likely to bring challenges for children and young people navigating their return into school and more formal learning environments. The key focus for the team will be supporting children and young people back into a more routine learning environment 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.

EMOTIONAL WELLBEING OF OUR CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS

Children, young people and care experienced young adults have been well supported throughout this year with a number of online initiatives taking place alongside our usual services continuing to deliver their programs of support.

In response to the need to remain at home and isolate throughout spring and into summer and how this may impact our children, Barnet Integrated Clinical Services (BICS) provided several online video workshop resources for children. BICS introduced a new podcast series to support children and carers' well-being during lockdown, and established a public phone line for young people to access mental health support.

Topics of the podcasts included mental wellbeing, managing relationships, exam results, emotions and anxiety, emotions and anger and 'what does mental health mean to you'.

In addition, BICS services has developed several workshops to support all children living in Barnet, including the children in our care.

These workshops include support around returning to school, transitioning from primary to secondary school, managing exam stress, anxiety around attending school and workshops to support young people with worries and anxieties, called Mind and Mood.

Kooth, our online counselling service, saw between 124 and 170 new users per month during 2020/21. We increased the number of hours from Kooth to better support children's mental health needs, from 528 to 660 per quarter. The service saw a 42% increase in the number of logins compared to the previous year, confirming that children and young people are making use of the mental health services and supports available to them.

For in-person and more comprehensive support, BICS continued to offer social, emotional, behaviour and mild to moderate mental health support to children, young people and their carers through a hybrid of virtual and direct sessions. BICS clinicians are now embedded across the children in care service under the supervision of the BICS clinical manager. Between April 2020 and April 2021, the BICS service worked with 152 children and young people, and received 48 new referrals during the same period.

Terepia 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 Terepia was increased to ensure more young people are able to access the service in 2020/21.



VOICE OF THE CHILD

Throughout 2020/21 the Family Services Workforce Development Team has been mapping and collating child consultation, participation initiatives and service-user feedback to inform a comprehensive and meaningful Feedback, Engagement and Participation Strategy.

There is a broad range of feedback, participation and engagement activities taking place across services but, these require stronger coordination and development to ensure that children, young people and their families see our efforts to engage them as purposeful and impactful. We wish to develop a more accountable process in which we demonstrate how we listen, change and develop in response to their feedback and efforts.

Throughout 2020/21 the Head of Service maintained an open feedback loop with the BOP (#Barnet on Point) Chair throughout the year. While BOP sessions quickly moved from face-to-face group meetings to virtual sessions at the start of the pandemic, attendance dropped as children and young experienced digital fatigued as their entire social world became mediated through a screen.

When possible to do so, the Head of Service, the met with the Chair of Children in Care Council in the community to review the revised Corporate Parenting Strategy and plan a relaunch of face-to-face BOP events. A relaunch event took place in June 2021, with a plan of summer activities and a vibrant, dynamic program of events to take place throughout 2021/22.

Other virtual events that took place with children and young people include:

- BOP half term virtual activities taking place throughout the year attended by a small number of young people
- A virtual celebration event for children in care celebrating National Children in Care Day in February 2021
- A virtual foster carer and children in care Christmas Party in December 2021 with a visit from Father Christmas
- BOP Children in Care Council lead member attended virtual Skills to Foster training, where they shared their experience and needs in care, advising new foster carers how to develop good relationships with children.

Listen Up and Coram (independent research providers) have been commissioned to collect feedback and experiences of our most marginalised children with both analysis and recommendations due at the end of June.

In further recognition of the peculiar year experienced by children and young people, alongside the low (73/22%) take-up during the Children in Care survey in 2019/20, we commissioned the Bright Spots Survey in partnership with Coram Voice and the Rees Centre.

This survey closed in May 2021 with participation of 176 (54%) of children and young people and initial findings indicate that the majority of children know and trust their social worker, feel involved in decisions made about their lives and feel safe where they live. The full report will be available in September 2021 and will inform service and delivery for the year ahead.

The Strengths and Resilience Group has continued to provide a space for social and emotional connection for care experienced young adults throughout the year. The groups continue to be facilitated by the new Expert by Experience with the support of a Personal Advisor. The group continued to have a core membership of 4-5 young adults attending monthly sessions throughout the year.

As part of the consultation process for the Corporate Parenting Strategy, the Head of Service attended two sessions to hear young people share their views on what they need from their corporate parent. The themes from these discussions centred around housing, employment and confidence to be in the world. This feedback has led to a revision in the Care Leaver Housing Protocol, the NEET/EET project and the Independent living project, all launching in 2021/22.



APPENDIX

**CORPORATE
PARENTING**
Annual Report
2020-21

We heal for tomorrow By Niciara

Our generation had to forgive without apology
And understand that our pain was not inflicted consciously
We try to scrap the idea that what we feel is less than intention
Even when those before us fail to mention
That their own ways of teaching
Still leave them seeking
Some kind of peace and some kind of closure
Most still believe too much exposure
Only causes damage and cannot heal
Which led me today to strongly feel
For the generation after us we have to do better...
Be real and be vulnerable
So we cant teach them to be comfortable
With the idea that we are imperfect, we still learn
And til our last breath we will earn
Stripes for something new we take
And to not deal with our mistakes
Leaves our peace of mind at stake
Can we pledge to teach our tomorrow?
That to feel angry, neglected and sorrow
Are real emotions and should be expressed
In a way where we can help them to feel it less
