



# Voice and Participation Service Quarter 1 Report

*Prepared by*

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**Voice** and   
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# FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

## Children in Care Council

### **Adventure Day (9th April):**

A total of 16 children in care participated in outdoor activities and team-building activities

### **Watersports Day (28th May):**

15 children in care attended a watersports day they took part in raft building and paddleboarding

### **PGL Trip (14-16 June):**

20 children in care attended a residential trip to PGL Liddington. This multi-day event offered a variety of team-building and adventure activities, further strengthening bonds among the children and giving them an extended period to experience new challenges in a supportive environment.

These events also allowed the children to interact with others in similar circumstances, helping to build a supportive community and create lasting, positive relationships among participants.



# CICC COPRODUCTION

## **Residential Home Visit (12th August 2024):**

Two young people attended a youth inspection and training session at the new residential home in Melksham, Phoenix. They explored the facility, provided feedback, and conducted a group training discussion with the staff, sharing insights from their own experiences of living in residential homes. The provided feedback influenced care approaches at the new residential home.

## **Joint Care Experienced Session with Wiltshire and BANES (19th June 2024):**

Five care leavers from Wiltshire had the opportunity to meet with care leaver ambassadors from BANES (Bath and North East Somerset) Off the Record. The session facilitated insightful discussions and exchange of ideas regarding ongoing work and experiences.

## **Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP):**

Two to three Voice Ambassadors consistently participated in each Corporate Parenting Panel meeting, where they shared updates on their work as part of the Voice and Participation Service. Voice Ambassadors' regular involvement in CPP meetings informs decision-making and is a reminder of the lives behind the data.

## **Chief Executive Interview Panel (16th July 2024):**

One care-experienced Voice Ambassador was part of the interview panel for the Chief Executive position, ensuring that young people had a say in the hiring process. Involvement of a care-experienced Voice Ambassador in the interview panel aligned leadership with young people's needs.

## **Young Person Fostering Panels**

Seven fostering panels were held, with eight different care-experienced young people participating. These panels provided applicant foster carers with a unique opportunity to engage with 'experts by experience,' offering valuable insights that could enhance their understanding and readiness to foster.

## **Voice Ambassador and CiCC Training Workshop (22nd June 2024):**

A Voice Ambassador for SEND and a Children in Care Council member delivered a training workshop to volunteer advocates. The session provided a unique opportunity for advocates to learn directly from young people who are experts by experience.

## **Practice Educator Training (15th July 2024):**

Ambassadors supported the delivery of a training session for practice educators, aimed at improving the practice and approach of social workers and their students, particularly in ensuring inclusivity for young people and parents with lived experience. This training inspired social workers to adopt inclusive and trauma-aware approaches

## **Safeguarding East Open Day (17th May 2024):**

Focused on safeguarding practices and how those impact those with lived experience.

## **Family Time Training with Foster Carers (12th June 2024):** Addressed best practices for family time arrangements.

## **Writing Workshops (10th July 2024):**

Conducted during the South West IRO/Conferencing Officer Virtual Regional Conference, aimed at improving staff's empathetic and trauma-aware writing skills.

*Last Year's*

# MIND OF MY OWN

The Mind of My Own Lead attended the Vox Con annual conference on May 16th.

The team provides regular monthly updates on staff and team usage to promote the app.



## **Outcomes:**

- Opportunity to network and represent Wiltshire at a national level.
- Participation in unique workshops and updates during the Vox Con session.
- Empowering staff to utilise Mind Of My Own, a valuable tool for young people to share their experiences.
- Due to the team's efforts, there was an increase to 72 statements in July, showing positive progress towards the target of achieving 100 statements monthly.

The Mind of My Own App will be a key tool for the new Independent Advocacy Service its features include personalised profiles, secure messaging, and easy-to-navigate categories for different types of support and feedback. This will help streamline the advocacy process, making it more efficient and responsive to individual needs. By providing a platform for direct and unfiltered communication, it ensures that every voice is heard and valued, ultimately leading to more tailored and effective support services.



# Wiltshire Youth Council

## **One Council Approach:**

The capacity to deliver on Wiltshire Youth Council has been reduced due to focussing on working with Wiltshire's most vulnerable cohorts. The Voice and Participation Service has been exploring how other directorates can assist in the delivery of the initiative. Democratic Services has agreed to facilitate the Wiltshire Youth Council elections.

## **Youth Council Meetings:**

Since April, the Youth Council has held five meetings with various guests, including representatives from School Effectiveness and Public Health. Upcoming meetings in September will feature discussions with Libraries on the new five-year strategy and with Community Engagement on the Community Area Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (CAJSNA) results, which Youth Councillors and CiCC members contributed to earlier in the year.

## **Mental Health First Aid Training:**

Four Wiltshire Youth Councillors attended Mental Health First Aid training at their request. Discussions have been held on how they will implement this training in their schools by acting as Mental Health Ambassadors from September onwards. The Youth Councillors will collaborate with link teachers to embed these practices and will provide feedback on their progress.



## **Youth Conference (Youth Con) – 27th July 2024:**

Four Youth Councillors, including three Members of Youth Parliament (MYPs) and the Head Secretary, attended the South West Youth Conference. They participated in workshops, engaged in discussions about the "Make Your Mark" results, and connected with other MYPs from the region. Additionally, the dates for the MYP residential were set for 25th to 27th October 2024.

## **Hygiene Product Campaign:**

The Youth Council continues to work on their hygiene product campaign, which involves setting up donation boxes in schools that are part of the Youth Council.

## **Healthy Schools Inspections:**

Youth Councillors conducted three youth inspections as part of the Wiltshire Healthy Schools programme in partnership with Nick Bolton from School Effectiveness. These inspections received significant public attention, highlighting the schools' efforts to promote healthy lifestyles and well-being.



## Outcomes:

### **Empowerment and Representation:**

Youth Councillors feel that their voices are being heard through their interactions with various council staff, allowing them to represent the interests of young people on key issues effectively.

### **Mental Health Ambassadorship:**

In response to the Youth Councillors' request, a Mental Health First Aid training session was delivered by Nick Bolton on 20th July 2024. This training equips them to serve as mental health and wellbeing ambassadors in their schools, promoting mental health awareness and support.

### **Understanding and Advocacy:**

The MYPs have gained a clear understanding of their roles and are now equipped to promote the "Make Your Mark" campaign within their schools and communities.

### **Personal Achievements:**

- One Youth Councillor successfully applied to Bishop Wordsworth School, using their work with the Youth Council as a reference.
- A former Youth Councillor completed their Gold Duke of Edinburgh (D of E) Award, using their involvement in the Youth Council as part of their evidence.



# FAMILY VOICE

## Parental advocacy

The Family Voice service plays an essential role in supporting parents during Child Protection Conferences, offering crucial assistance in understanding the processes, accessing reports, and effectively communicating with professionals. By preparing parents for these meetings, the service significantly reduces stress and fosters better communication between parents and professionals, ensuring parents are informed and confident.

Advocacy cases have been a key area of focus, with five cases successfully closed and five live referrals currently being managed. The service has actively supported parents during critical meetings, including attending three Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPCs) and five Review Child Protection Conferences (RCPCs). Additionally, five Core Group meetings were attended at parents' homes, and a complaint meeting was attended in person, providing parents with consistent support throughout the process.

In preparation for these meetings, the service conducted 16 pre-meeting home visits. These visits were instrumental in ensuring that parents were well-prepared, informed, and confident before attending their meetings. Furthermore, restorative work has been an integral part of the service, with a preparative meeting conducted with a parent, followed by a joint session with both the parent and young person. This approach has been successful in fostering better understanding and communication within families.

The outcomes of these advocacy efforts have been overwhelmingly positive. Feedback from parents indicates significant improvements in their confidence, communication, and relationships with social workers. Parents reported a dramatic increase in their confidence to speak up, with initial scores rising from 1 to 5 (1 = lowest 5 = Highest) by the end of the advocacy process. Similarly, feelings of being listened to improved from an initial score of 1 to a final score of 5. Parents also felt more valued and included in decisions, with scores in these areas increasing from 1 to 3. The relationship between parents and social workers saw substantial improvement as well, with the score rising from 1 to 5.

These outcomes clearly demonstrate the positive impact of advocacy in empowering parents, helping them feel more confident, listened to, and involved in the decision-making processes affecting their families. The lessons learned from these advocacy efforts are vital for shaping feedback and improving systemic practices to better support families in the future.

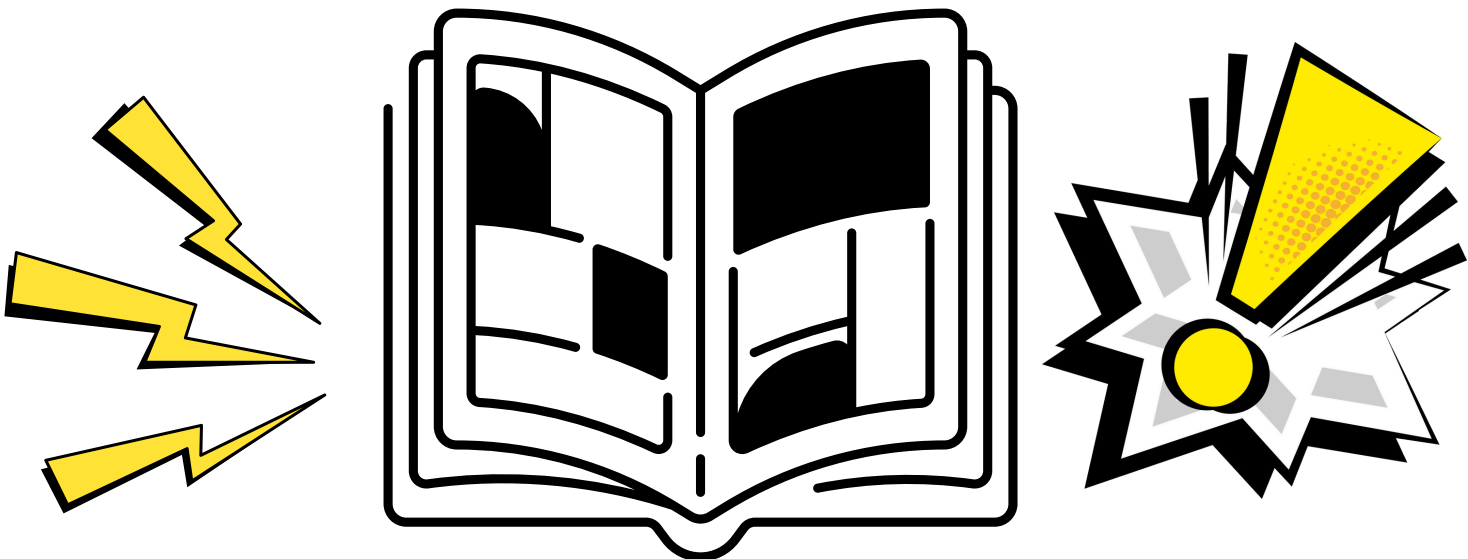


## Family Advisory Board

The Family Advisory Board (FAB) remains an active and essential component of the Family Voice service. Key members consistently participate in monthly meetings, where they host guest speakers and collaborate on creating tools and strategies for social workers. Recently, FAB members contributed by reviewing draft Child Protection documents, offering valuable insights to senior leadership. This involvement ensures that family voices and experiences are incorporated into the development of policies and practices affecting child protection services.

FAB members have highlighted that professionals often overlook identifying parents' SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) requirements during assessments by Family and Children's Services. Research conducted in Wiltshire supports this observation, stating, "In 40% of cases, there was no evidence of tailored interventions, especially related to pre-birth work. There was minimal adjustment in pre-proceedings, including a lack of adaptation in the forms used." The FAB is currently collaborating with a task group to create a new Additional Needs Screening Tool that will help professionals identify if someone has an additional need so they can tailor support adequately.

The Family Advisory Board is also working on a comic book that illustrates how parents feel when they are being worked with by professionals. The ambition is that the comic will follow a family from their first interaction with professionals through the whole process. When complete this will be shared with the workforce.





# INDEPENDENT ADVOCACY SERVICE



The service received 32 referrals during the Q1 period. The distribution of cases includes 12 active Children Looked After (CLA) cases, 13 active Child Protection (CP) cases, and various other categories, such as Care Leavers and Children in Need (CIN). Seven cases were successfully closed, while 24 remain open and actively managed.

One notable case involved a young person expressing emotions regarding fabricated allegations and highlighted issues with living arrangements and bullying at school. The service advocated for educational support, including the need for a Teaching Assistant (TA), and ensured that the young person's wishes were documented and discussed in relevant meetings. This advocacy led to increased confidence in the young person, empowering them to express their feelings in person during the Child Protection Conference.

Lessons learned during this period have highlighted the need for improved management of cases involving children with multiple statuses, such as those who are under both the Independent Mental Capacity Advocate (IMCA) and CLA frameworks. To address this, the service is developing a dashboard to better track these cases and streamline the referral process, particularly for children on child protection pathways, aiming to reduce last-minute referrals for Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPCs).

In terms of process improvements, a new referral pathway for ICPCs has been introduced. This pathway includes integrating advocacy service information into ICPC invites, improving communication between advocates and social workers, and ensuring parental agreement before proceeding with referrals. The service has also developed a new wishes and feelings document that better captures the views of children and young people, helping Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and CP Chairs understand how the young person has reacted to sensitive information.

Overall, the Independent Advocacy Service is evolving to better meet the needs of its clients, with continuous improvements being made to referral processes, case management, and the quality of advocacy provided to children and families.

# SEND VOICE

## **Post-16 SEND Deep Dive**

The Post-16 SEND Deep Dive focused on four key areas: Community Inclusion, Independent Living, Employment, and Health. The primary purpose was to gather and amplify the voices of young people with SEND in Wiltshire, assessing their confidence in transitioning to adulthood, identifying areas where additional support is needed, and recognising effective strategies already in place. This was achieved through in-person consultations with 30 young people across five settings, supplemented by secondary research from Wiltshire CIL and WPCG. The findings from this deep dive were integrated into the SEND strategy, ensuring that the voices of young people are not only heard but acted upon. This report was subsequently forwarded to key stakeholders for inclusion in broader strategic planning.

## **Inclusion in Mainstream Deep Dive**

A deep dive into SEN support within mainstream education was conducted, highlighting important areas of learning, such as building confidence in young people with additional needs and promoting inclusion within schools. The Wiltshire Youth Council, which includes young representatives from mainstream schools across the county, played a crucial role in these discussions. Young people expressed that they would likely turn to their school's pastoral services, peers, or use the SIMs system to share information about their additional needs if they needed support to have their voices heard. Although time constraints affected the quality of the report, it is currently being revised to meet the expected standards, ensuring that it effectively contributes to ongoing discussions on mainstream inclusion.

## **Networking**

Throughout the period, valuable connections were established with various groups, including Iproffit, Silverwood, 4Youth, Springfields, and Canons House. These engagements have significantly enhanced collaboration opportunities for future SEND initiatives, strengthening the network of support and resources available.

### **SENDIAP Consultations**

Involvement in the SENDIAP consultations focused on incorporating the views of parents and young people into the SENDIAP strategy. The role in the working group was pivotal in ensuring that the strategy was developed with a strong emphasis on authenticity, truly representing the voices of those who were consulted.

## **Silverwood Fair**

Voice ambassadors participated in the Silverwood Fair, actively promoting involvement with the council and advocacy for young people. This event successfully engaged young people, empowering them to share their views and contribute to decision-making processes, thus enhancing their participation in shaping policies that affect them.



### **SHARE Initiative**

The SHARE initiative serves as a platform for professionals across education, health, and social care to collaborate and better understand the needs of children with SEND. Preparations are underway for the first theme meeting scheduled for September, which will focus on children's involvement in EHCP reviews. An information package for professionals has been prepared and is ready for dissemination to ensure informed and cohesive participation in the initiative.

### **Local Offer Videos**

A project is underway to co-produce videos covering Community Inclusion, Independent Living, Employment, and Health, aimed at making the Local Offer more accessible and engaging. These videos will highlight available services, success stories, and personal experiences, thereby enhancing the overall impact of the Local Offer.

### **SEND Development Plan**

Collaboration with various stakeholders has led to the development of a comprehensive SEND Development Plan. This plan outlines upcoming projects and goals, streamlining processes to ensure that the local offer reflects the impact of ongoing work and continues to meet the needs of the SEND community effectively.

### **Replacement of POET Survey**

The objective to replace the POET survey with a new tool that better meets the needs of the SEND community is in the initial planning stages. Work is ongoing to develop a draft and an accessibility plan that will ensure the new survey is fit for purpose and inclusive of all voices.

### **Ambassador Training**

To enhance the effectiveness of voice ambassadors in meetings and advocacy, a focus on developing their professional skills has been a priority. A training day has been organised to further build their skills and confidence, enabling them to contribute more effectively to discussions and decision-making processes.

### **Summary of Outcomes**

The efforts made through these initiatives have ensured that young people's voices are thoroughly integrated into key strategic plans and initiatives. Engagement has been strengthened across the SEND sector, with increased collaboration with stakeholders and empowerment of young people to participate in decision-making. The continuous focus on strategic development has contributed to the refinement and implementation of the SEND strategy and related projects, ensuring that they remain responsive to the evolving needs of the SEND community.



# Young Carers

## **Young Carers Festival (28th - 30th June)**

The Voice and Participation Service accompanied 10 members of the Young Carers Council to the annual Young Carers Festival to foster connections within the group. The group gave their views on the national conversation around what they expect from a new government and also took over the young carers radio for part of the weekend. The young participants described the weekend as fantastic and are looking forward to attending again next year.

## **Young Carers Council**

The Young Carers Council has met once since the festival, the meeting looked at what they would like to be called as a group and also prepared them to be part of the interview process for the new Young Carers Workers due to join the team.



## **Young Carers Voice Worker**

The role for Young Carers is now open, and we aim to have someone in this position by late autumn.

## **Young Carers Schools Worker**

The role for Young Carers in schools is currently open, and we plan to fill this role by late autumn.

## **Young Carers Advocate**

The Young Carers Advocacy position will become available once we have recruited another Advocate for the Independent Advocacy Service.

# FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S VOLUNTEERING

## **Community Mentoring**

5 children were receiving mentoring once a week during this period.

2 children completed their mentoring, we were only able to get feedback from one of these children. In comparison to when the child first started mentoring, she reported an increase in self-esteem/and or confidence, relationships with friends, physical wellbeing, emotional wellbeing, and independence skills. (in areas where an improvement is not shown, this can be because the child was scoring high at the beginning of the mentoring or the child's score has stayed the same). Narrative feedback from the child, mentor and parent was positive.

We now have a shortage of female mentors and need to have a marketing plan in place for the Autumn.

We have some male mentors waiting to be matched but have not had referrals in the areas where the mentors are. Sean is sending out regular emails to the Young People's Service detailing where we have mentors waiting.



## **Youth Justice Panel's**

During the reporting period, the Youth Justice Service conducted a total of 53 panels, facilitated by 16 different volunteers. These panels resulted in 9 children receiving a Referral Order, with 8 of these Orders being successfully completed by the end of the quarter. Impressively, 94.34% of the scheduled panels proceeded as planned, reflecting a strong level of adherence to the planned schedule.

However, some challenges have been identified. Concerns have been raised by panel members regarding the cancellation of panels, which occur for various reasons. A particular issue has been the cancellation of panels due to staff sickness. To address this, efforts are being made to ensure that other staff members are available to provide cover, thereby reducing the frequency of such cancellations.

Additionally, there is a recognised need for more panel members to ensure comprehensive coverage across all areas of the county. In response to this need, plans are in place to offer panel training for new volunteers in the Autumn, which is expected to bolster the team and improve the service's capacity to handle future panels effectively

## **Primary Mentoring**

In the past quarter, our school mentoring program has shown notable success. We supported 34 children, surpassing our annual target of 30 children within just the first three months. This early achievement reflects the program's growing impact and effectiveness.

Of these 34 children, 10 completed their mentoring sessions during this period.

Feedback from various stakeholders—including children, schools, mentors, and parents—has been overwhelmingly positive. This feedback underscores the value and positive influence of our mentoring program on participants.

A significant development this quarter is the approval from the Commissioners to trial a new primary-to-secondary mentoring transition program. This initiative will support 4 children transitioning from two primary schools to their secondary schools. The mentoring will continue for the first two terms in the secondary school, with the same mentor providing weekly support. This trial addresses a long-standing request from primary schools, children, parents, and mentors and represents a promising step forward in our programme's evolution.

## **Appropriate Adults and Youth Justice Voice**

Since joining us on 19th June, our new Voice and Participation Support Worker has made significant contributions across both the Youth Justice Service (YJS) and Voice and Participation (V&P) roles. With extensive experience as an Appropriate Adult (AA), she has greatly alleviated the support burden by assisting with AA duties, providing essential coverage, and reducing the support load for volunteer AAs.

Currently, her work is focused on several key areas. The First Time Entrants (FTEs) into Police Custody project aims to gather feedback from children who experience police custody for the first time through face-to-face meetings. She also provides support to these children and their families until a case worker is assigned. In addition, she is collating data from all AA episodes, including those involving volunteers, social workers, and other support figures. This project will analyse the impact of AA training and address issues related to the lack of legal representation when an AA is untrained.

Another important area of focus is the rise in knife crime among children. This project seeks to investigate the underlying causes and explore preventive measures through feedback collected from affected children and their case workers. Similarly, she is involved in a project addressing the increase in assaults by girls on emergency workers. This initiative aims to understand the reasons behind these incidents by interviewing the involved girls and developing strategies to prevent future occurrences. This project was initiated by a volunteer panel member who will compile a report on the findings.

A recent development is the return of the Appropriate Adults to the Melksham Custody Suite in May, following the revamp of the Swindon Custody Suite. This change has allowed some AAs to resume their roles who were previously unable to travel to Swindon.

Despite these advancements, there are challenges that need to be addressed. There have been delays in the FTE project due to issues with gaining access to police custody, and it is anticipated that additional police checks may be required beyond the standard DBS checks. Additionally, there is an ongoing need for more Appropriate Adults to cover the rota, particularly at weekends. Recruitment efforts are necessary to ensure adequate coverage and support for the programme.





# Independent Visitors Scheme

The Independent Visitor (IV) Scheme has shown significant activity over the period from April to June 2024. A total of 10 referrals were received, with 11 assessments and 7 matches completed during this period. On average, the time taken from referral to match was 171 days, while the time from assessment to match averaged 124 days. Despite these challenges, the scheme managed to arrange a total of 199 visits, with 167 of those visits being successfully completed. Currently, there are 121 open IV cases, with the majority (85) at the matched stage. The data shows that 18% of the children and young people in care in Wiltshire are supported by an IV, one of the highest percentages in the country. During this period, 85 children and young people were actively receiving support from an IV, and 4 new IVs were recruited, with 3 more anticipated to join in August.

However, several challenges were identified. There are currently 6 children whose referrals are on hold due to placement instability, and another 6 children in out-of-county placements, for whom matching with local IVs has become increasingly difficult due to recruitment challenges in those areas.

Moreover, there are 25 children on the waiting list who have been assessed but are yet to be matched with an IV. This situation raises concerns about the capacity of the current support staff, as the number of matches increases, potentially necessitating additional resources to manage the growing caseload effectively.