

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE

Right2Rights's (R2R's)

ANNUAL REPORT 2017- 2018

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 This Annual Rights2rights Report reflects the progress and contribution the R2R service has made to the outcomes for Looked after Children in Rotherham through the provision of the advocacy service and Independent visitors (IV's) scheme. The criteria for the IV's scheme is clearly set out in the Children and Young Persons Act (2008) which places a duty on us to make Independent Visitors available to all children in care if this is deemed to be in their best interests. In relation to Advocacy this is offered to any child or young person who is or has ever been looked after no matter their age or the length of time they were looked after. This report includes quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the R2R's service for the period of April 2017 to March 2018.

2.0 Purpose and context of the Service

2.1 The Children's Rights Service within RMBC commenced in 1999 with the introduction of the Children's Rights Officer post which has gradually evolved into the current Right 2 Rights Service. We provide services for children and young people who are, or who have been, looked after by the local Authority. The demand for the service of the Rights to Rights workers has grown with the increase in the number of children and young people who have become looked after. At the end of March 2016 there were 432 children in Rotherham's care, at the end of March 2017 there were 490 and at the end of March 2018 the number had risen to 628. At the time of writing, the figure as at October 2018 is 648.

2.2 Ofsted commented on the Rights to Rights service in both their reports in 2014 and again in 2018. The Ofsted Inspection in October, 2014 highlighted:

"The Right 2 Rights Service provides independent visitors and advocacy services, which children like"

Ofsted noted the following in their inspection report in 2017-2018:

“All children looked after have the opportunity to access a comprehensive advocacy offer. The independent visitor scheme is well promoted and take-up is good. Independent visitors have extensive training to ensure that they give children consistent support. Children are well supported to make complaints.”

– Ofsted 2017 para 39.

2.3 The 3 main elements of the Rights to Rights service within Rotherham are as follows;

- **Advocacy** - Advocacy provides; information, advice, representation and support. Looked after children and young people are empowered to express their views, wishes, feelings and needs in creative and informative ways. If they are struggling to or are unable or unwilling to share their views with professionals or carers the aim of the service is to empower, support and assist them, to have their voice and views heard and taken into account.
- **Independent Visitor Service** - Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council is duty bound by legislation to provide a Volunteer Independent Visitor Service for looked after children and young. The Children and Young Persons Act (2008) places a duty on us to make Independent Visitors available to all children in care if this is deemed to be in their best interests.
- **Rights and raising awareness for young people looked after** – to support young people to know their rights and entitlements and provide support where need to challenge the Local Authority on a case by case basis, in line with these rights and entitlements. The service also plays a key role in escalating cases where there are barriers to young people having full access and offering thematic feedback to ensure that services are improved and the voice for children is heard through service and practice development.

3.0 Profile of the Rights to Rights Service

3.1 The Rotherham R2R's Service is situated within the Safeguarding Unit. Other teams and services within the Unit include Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's), Foster Care IRO, Child Protection Conference Chairs, Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and the Public Law Outline Manager. Being managed within the Safeguarding Unit offers a level of independence from the case management function for Children in care (CIC), but also provides positive link with the independent function of the IRO and LADO, with whom the service regularly works to raise and resolve issues that have been raised by young people in relation to being looked after.

3.2 In addition to the core function of the role of providing advocacy and independent visitor service the Rights2Rights service is also at times engaged as a 'the voice of the child' and brings this knowledge to:

- Meetings on individual cases such as strategy meetings, planning meetings, meetings under LADO procedures and TAP meetings.
- Training and development, including inputting to the training of Independent Visitors and Volunteers.
- Assisting with addressing of complaints and investigations.
- Supporting staff induction and awareness rising across the service.
- Highlighting good practice (by workers/partner agencies/carers), as well as feeding back evidence of poor practice, concerns about placements or safeguarding issues

4.0 Developing a Stable and Permanent Team

4.1 The Right 2 Rights Service is made up of the following staff:

- Rebecca Wall - Head of Service for Safeguarding.
- Tracey Arnold – Service Manager for the IRO and Advocacy Service.
- Annette Marshall – Advocate and Independent Visitor co-ordinator, (Full Time).
- Peter Storer – Advocate, (Full time).
- Sally Ann Fisher – Advocate, (30 hours).
- Team manager – long term absence
- Anna Wells – Business Support.

5.0 In relation to measuring impact we have asked ourselves?

What are our children and young people saying about the Rights 2 Rights service? How effective are we at promoting change for our young people in terms of the things that matter to them? What impact are we having on the lives of our individual children?

Here are some of the comments from our young people:

"I knew you would help me Sally, you always do, you sort things out when I need them, proper mint advocate".

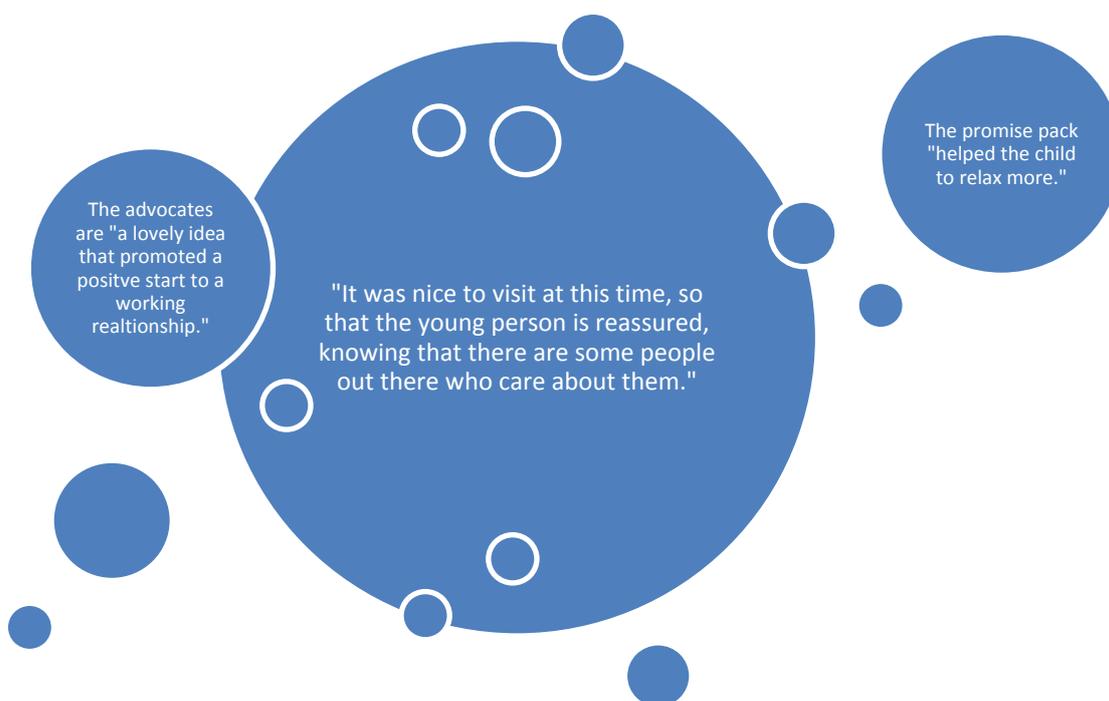
"Well, you are really good at your job. You are great and hard working".

"Guess what, passport has arrived. Phew!! Thank you so much for your help. You have been brilliant".

"The promise pack is a good idea as it tells me what I am entitled to and helps me to understand why I am in this situation."

"Pete introduced me to the LAC council and organised for me to attend, I was scared at first but its great and gave me lots of new friends."

In terms of the impact highlighted in feedback from the foster carers for our young people;



It's the little things that matter and make a difference. For our Looked after Children, it's exactly the same. The following are some of the ways in which the Advocacy service has made a difference and an impact to our children and the quotes are taken from our advocates:





6.0 Key areas of work and Impact.

6.1 In order that our Looked After children are afforded the opportunity to have an Advocate, every child over the age of 5 will have an initial visit from an Advocate within the 6 weeks of becoming Looked after. A Promise Pack is given to them which has all the information they need in order to ensure they understand their rights in terms of their Looked after status. Their foster carers are encouraged to explore the information with the children.

6.2 From the 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018, the Advocacy service undertook 115 initial visits to our children and saw 148 children in total. Only 3 children refused a visit by the service.

6.3 In terms of those children and young people who go on to have an Advocacy service, where do our referrals come from:

Source of Advocacy Referrals	Numbers
Made by the Young person after the Advocates initial visit.	19
From Social Workers.	14
From IRO's.	13
From foster carers.	16
From PA's,	1
From parents,	1
From NHS professionals,	2
From the Children's Commissioners Office,	2 – This figure is from the website "Help at Hand."

6.4 The vast majority of our referrals come from four different sources. We work closely to maintain these working relationships with these groups. We need to consider further awareness raising with the other groups so that more of our children have access to the Advocacy service to enable their voices to influence their plans and agreed outcomes.

6.5 The following table gives a snap shot of the working figures for the Advocacy Service within the reporting period:

Advocacy Referrals from April 2017 to March 2018.	Numbers
New referrals received.	68
Referrals closed.	50
Young person declined following referral or wanted referral withdrawn.	9
Ongoing Advocacy over 1 year.	33
Cases carried forward from the previous reporting year.	73
Active Advocacy cases year ending March 2018.	82

6.6 Whilst the number of referrals received for the year ending March 2018 totalled 68, in the 6 months to October 2018, there have been a further 35 referrals for Advocacy made. The number of advocacy referrals has increased overall from a total of 39 in 2014, 56 in 2015, and 46 in 2016.

6.7 There has been an increase in the duration that advocacy cases have been open. This has increased from 13 in the last reporting period, to 33 in 2017-2018. There are a number of factors which contribute towards this; the complexity of some of the complaints and advocacy issues and that complex needs of some of our young people who do feel that Advocacy supports them to have their voice heard.

6.8 We can only help develop the service across the LAC, IRO and Advocacy service when we know the nature of the issues which our children and

young people want an Advocate to help address. The following are the themes over the last reporting period:

Themes and issues from Referrals for the Advocacy Service.	Numbers
To be supported to make a complaint.	19
To be listened to around concerns about their accommodation/placement.	14
To have their wishes and feelings heard around issues of contact with their birth family.	12
Issues with their social worker or change of social worker.	9
To be able to change school or go to a school of their choice.	8
To be supported to access legal advice.	4
Help in accessing financial entitlements.	4
Other issues.	9

6.9 The main focus of the issues which our advocates represent for the young people are primarily around the child or young person having their voice heard sufficiently enough to make a difference to their lives and what matters to them. Having their voices heard around contact is a consistent theme from the previous reporting period. Young people sharing concerns about their accommodation and placement is also another expected reoccurring theme.

6.10 The basic building blocks to ensure that our young people mature into well rounded and emotionally intelligent adults is to have their voice heard and for that voice to make a difference when at all possible. Advocates are therefore fundamental in supporting our children and young people on their journey to adulthood.

7.0 Independent Visitor Service

7.1 The Independent Visitor (IV) role is that of a befriender. Once trained and matched with a child or young person they will agree a plan of visiting with the young person. Given the nature of their befriending role they do not have a work plan; the focus of the work is to build the young person's support network outside of the professional world. They are expected to attend support sessions at six weekly intervals and an annual review is completed by the IV coordinator. Where there are any worries or concerns they would link with the Rights to Rights service to discuss. If they have immediate safeguarding concerns out of hours, they would link with the carer if appropriate and or Out of Hours to ensure action is taken if needed to keep a young person safe.

7.2 The relationship is a confidential one and information is only shared if the child or young person agrees, dependent on age and understanding, or if safeguarding issues arise. The volunteers receive no payment, only

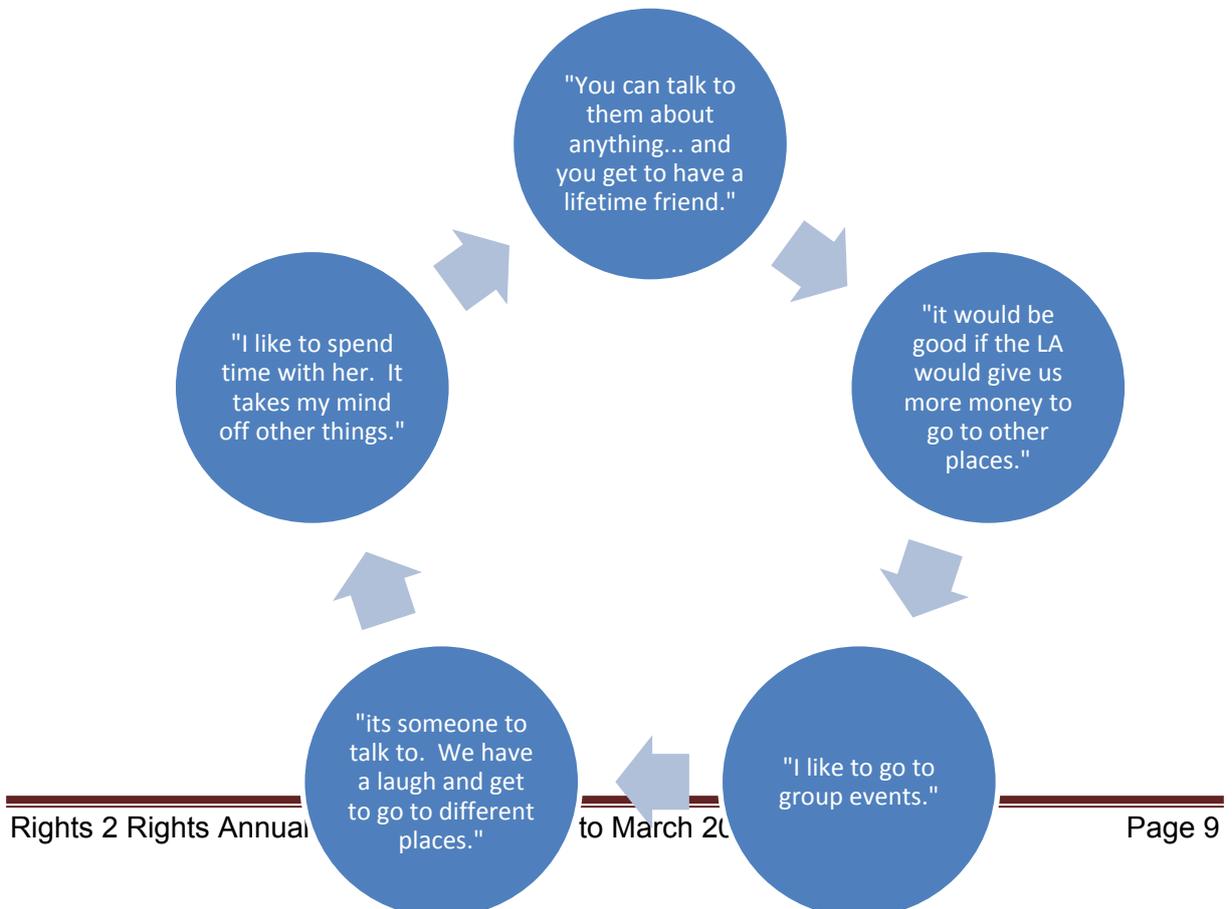
expenses around travel and activities that are agreed with the young person, as part of their plan.

7.3 Independent visitors within RMBC are recruited on the basis of a making a long term commitment to a child of at least 2 years. Generally we support the young people having time with their IV fortnightly for approximately two hours, although this can vary as once the relationship is established the service is child-led. Distance can also be a barrier.

7.4 Support and advice is offered and available to the IV's is via the Rights to Rights service through the week and if they have any safeguarding concerns at any other time they will discuss with the carer (if appropriate) and with Out of hours if advice or action is needed. They are also expected to attend one of the 6 weekly support groups that offer a time and place for the IV's to meet and confidentially seek additional support. The sessions also support further training and awareness rising around key issues such as complaints, transitions and leaving care issues.

7.5 While the service is in place until the age of 18 we do not automatically cease the contact. For some of your young vulnerable people, especially those with a high level of additional needs, this is a difficult time, so we seek to reduce the contact slowly and are in discussion with Adults to see if this support can and should continue for some.

8.0 What did our young people say about having an independent visitor and what was the impact on their lives?



9.0 What did our Independent Visitors say about their role with our Young People:



10.0 What does the IV service look like within Rotherham?

10.1 The IV service is coordinated via a senior advocate in the Rights to Rights Team with the support of the Business officer and the Service manager for IRO's and Advocacy.

10.2 There are currently thirteen independent visitors who are fully trained within Rotherham. There are currently five adults who have been successful at interview who are in the process of being matched and there are a further sixteen children waiting to have an Independent Visitor allocated to them. Of those 16 children, the vast majority are of White/British ethnicity, only 3 coming from an ethnic minority and 1 dual heritage young person. In terms of ages, the overwhelming majority are aged between 9 and 17.

11.0 Recruitment of Independent Visitors

11.1 There are currently 16 children on the waiting list for an independent visitor.

11.2 The training programme consists of 10 weekly sessions of 2 hours each, plus First Aid training, safeguarding training and Attachment Theory and DBS checks. The training is comprehensive and the sessions comprise of the following elements:

Week	Subject
1	Introduction to the role of volunteer independent visitor
2	Journey through care / adoption / out of authority
3	Social worker role
4	Rotherham Right2Rights Advocacy Services
5	Independent reviewing officer role / supporting the process
6	Health & wellbeing of LAC
7	Residential services
8	Fostering service
9	The virtual school
10	Independent visitor and young person

11.3 The process previously included a follow-up interview midway through the course, but the last programme utilised a questionnaire. This provides feedback to ensure the course is meeting the needs of attendees. Ongoing feedback is sought after each session with attendees completing an evaluation sheet; the following sessions are amended where necessary based on this information.

11.4 At the end of the 10 week course, a final interview is held to ensure that the requirements have been met and that the IV is happy to progress and to start discussing their matching requirements and preferences. Following this the Volunteer Co-ordinator will consider these preferences with the children on the waiting list and a follow up meeting will be arranged to discuss potential matches with the visitor.

11.5 It is understood that some Local Authorities have briefer courses than RMBC, but one of the aims of the course is to ensure that there is a testing of their commitment, given that we want to ensure they are serious about

the role, have some knowledge of the world they looked after young people experience and to have a support group around them that they feel invested in. The aim is that any person who drops out does this during the training process rather than at the matching stage.

12.0 Improvement Plan

12.1 The Rights2Rights Service Plan prioritised eight points to concentrate on between April 2017 to March 2018, which incorporated the following:

- a) To continue to improve the awareness of all children and young people who become looked after of their right to Advocacy and how to access this.
- b) To continue to improve the awareness of all children and young people in who are already in care of their right to Advocacy and how to access this.
- c) To develop an agreed protocol with Advocates around what can and should be recorded on a child's file; to ensure their voice is heard, while respecting they may want issues to be confidential.
- d) To continue to improve the recording of outcomes achieved, through robust recording of themes and issues, what is achieved and ensuring effective closure of cases.
- e) To increase the visibility of the IV service and progress matches.
- f) To seek feedback at the point of each case being closed about the Young persons' experience of the service. To ensure that the young people's voice is seen to drive service delivery forward.
- g) To ensure there are links developed with other advocacy and children's advocacy services both in and out of the borough to ensure a coordinated service, and build on strengths or agreed areas of need.
- h) To review the current staffing in the team to ensure it is sufficient to support the above areas of development.

13.0 Progress of the Improvement Plan Incorporating Signs of Safety

13.1 What is going well?

13.1.1 The Advocacy service are visiting children over 5 years old and young people who become looked after within 6 weeks. This reflects the demand and increase in looked after children.

13.1.2 We have had some great feedback from our young people about the impact the service has on their lives.

13.1.3 We know our children well.

13.1.4 We are working with more children year on year.

13.1.5 We are introducing group supervision for the Advocates which will be signs of safety focused.

13.2 What are we worried about?

13.2.1 Although there is a high number of looked after children, there is only a relatively small amount taking up Advocacy services. We need to increase our sphere of influence and this means going back to basics and developing our relationships with social workers, IRO's, foster carers and links with other professionals who work with looked after children.

13.2.2 We are working with a disproportionate number of White/British children and young people and ethnic minorities are under-represented within the ongoing Advocacy and Independent visitor services. Our recording data does not easily identify the specifics of young people's cultural identity therefore we have difficulty targeting those young people from different backgrounds that may want a service.

13.2.3 The number of children and young people within the Roma Slovak and Eastern European community who have become looked after has increased and they are not represented within the ongoing Advocacy and Independent figures.

13.2.4 There is a real lack of Independent Visitors from the diverse cultural backgrounds found in Rotherham and therefore how are we promoting their voices?

13.2.5 How do we record the impact of the Advocates work? At the present time, there is a separate recording system in place to record such work. This will need to change.

13.2.6 The offer of the Advocacy service is well known within the looked after service, but less so within locality teams.

13.2.7 At the present time, the complaints process remains the only avenue which children and young people can access in order to escalate their concerns. The introduction of an Escalation process akin to that of the IRO and conference chair process will give a formal structure to concerns that are raised so ensure minimal drift and delay.

13.3 What needs to happen?

13.3.1 Review the recording process for the Advocacy service so that the voice of the young person is captured.

- 13.3.2 Develop an Escalation process in line with the IRO and conference chair protocol to ensure that issues are formally monitored in terms of timescales.
- 13.3.3 Ensure advocacy records can be seen in the Liquid Logic journey recording system to ensure that we are able to target those young people who have a diverse cultural background to ensure their voices are heard.
- 13.3.4 Develop our links with the Roma/Slovak and Muslim communities in order to widen our scope in relation to Advocates and Independent visitors.
- 13.3.5 Develop our links with the Children's disability team in order that our most vulnerable children have access to Advocacy. We recognise this may need to include a close working relationship with the allocated workers / practitioners that know these children well
- 13.3.7 To increase the visibility of the Advocacy service by introducing Link Teams to the looked after service, locality and disability services. This is in line with the introduction of Link teams within the IRO service.
- 13.3.8 We need to agree our footprint and ensure that the outcomes for children that we work with are recorded and improvements measured.

Tracey Arnold
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October 2018