

Our Nottinghamshire Approach to Participation



Annual report

April 2024 - March 2025



**Nottinghamshire
County Council**

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Foreword

People know their own lives and journeys better than anybody else and should have the opportunity to participate in decisions which affect their lives.

Listening to and learning from the voices and experiences of children, young people, parents and carers, and enabling these to influence and shape our services is one of the key principles of Our Nottinghamshire (strengths-based) Approach. We were excited to host Listening and Learning Week in October 2024 to champion this way of working. Throughout the week 27 workshops and events took place. They focused on hearing and learning from the children, young people and families who have experience of Nottinghamshire support and services, and each other. The learning from some of these events is shared in this report. We know that when we involve people in the design, delivery and review of services, they will be better at meeting people's needs.

We have a workforce that cares about building positive and trusted relationships with children, young people and their families, and treating people with fairness and respect. Helping people to share their views about the support they are receiving is a core part of the role of child and family practitioners across our services. We have tools and resources which help us to do this well. Workers want to hear what is important to families, and the best ways we can help.

Our aspiration is that when individual views are shared, we gather these more effectively so that people have a strong collective voice when there are opportunities for improvements to how services are run and the way in which support is offered. Whether the focus of participation activity is on supporting individual children and families or co-producing and co-designing services

with a wider group of people, we want to make sure that everyone's voices and experiences are valued and make a difference.

Our **Children and Families Participation Network**, set up in Spring 2023, continues to provide a space for people working with children and families to learn, support each other, share best practice relating to participation and celebrate the impact this is having. Network members help make sure that people's voices are listened to, heard and have influence.

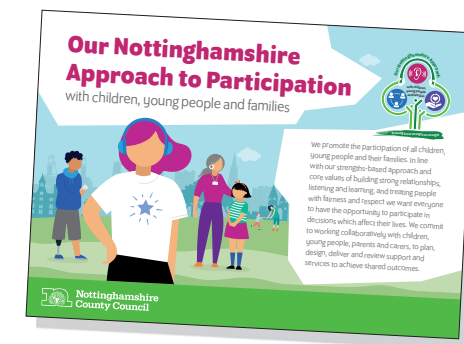
Our **Nottinghamshire Approach to Participation with children, young people and families** describes the key principles for effective participation, why it matters, how participation can have different focuses, and the legislation which underpins this.

Our **'Participation: voice, influence and change' web pages** provide more information about participation, how we do it, how people can get involved and examples of the difference it is making. Scan to find out more.



This annual report provides a more detailed overview of the participation activity taking place across Nottinghamshire. It describes the positive impact it has had on different groups of children and families over the past year, and our aspirations for the future, as participation becomes even more central to our culture and the way we work.

Jenny Smith, Strengths-Based Practice Lead,
in collaboration with the Children and Families Participation Network
Contact: jenny.smith@nottsc.gov.uk



Supporting participation in different ways

People can participate in lots of different ways and engagement can have different focuses. We are committed to involving children, young people, parents and carers in all areas as described in the image below, taken from Our Nottinghamshire Approach to Participation with children, young people and families.

Individual

- **Participation activity** relates directly to the person's own life
- **Outcomes** that primarily impact the individual.
- Involving people in their plan
- Peer support and mentoring.



Services for children, young people and families

- **Participation activity** aims to improve the quality of the service
- **Outcomes** affect a wider group of children, young people, parents, carers and families.
- Recruiting and interviewing staff
- Telling us about your experience of support and services.



The council

- **Participation activity** relates to planning, design, delivery and review of support and services
- **Outcomes** influence policy, practice and changes in your local area.
- Deciding how money should be spent
- Being on forums or boards that lead to change.



Voice, influence and change activity map

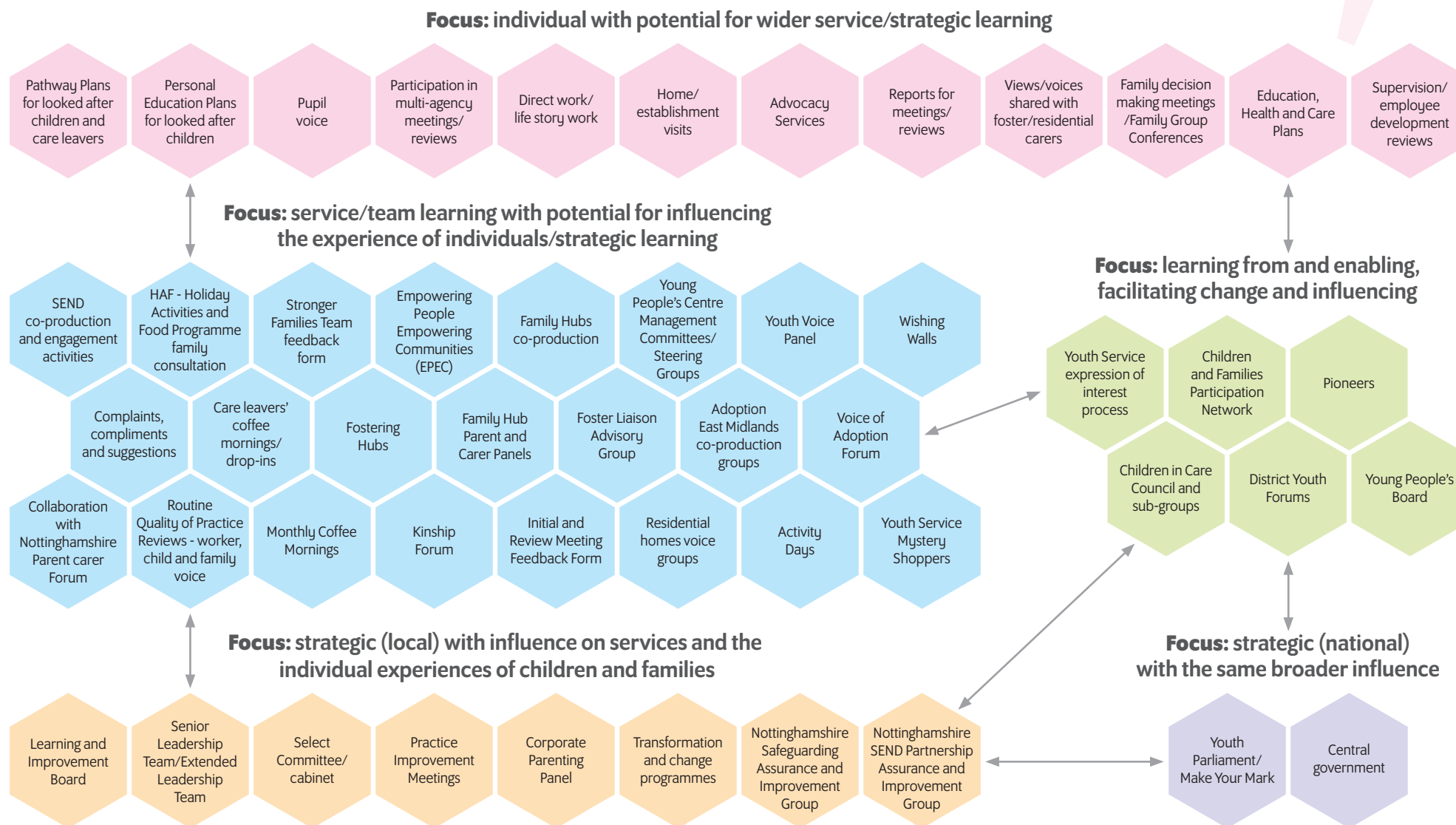
The voice, influence and change activity map (pictured on page 5) includes some of the different spaces and ways in which we listen to the voices of children and young people, parents, carers and their networks.

The arrows demonstrate that whilst the focus of the voice activity might be about someone's individual plan, for a specific team or service, or to try and influence the wider Children and Families Department or council, the learning could have a greater impact on the experiences and outcomes of more children, young people and families across Nottinghamshire.

The different activities included in the map are described further in the next section of this report or in appendix 1, where key terms are also defined.



Voice, influence and change activity map



Examples of how participation activities have made a difference

For children, young people, parents and carers accessing universal services and community-based early help



Local mental health support for young people through Retford Family Hub Network

Consultation and co-production have been at the heart of the development of Family Hubs in Nottinghamshire. The first to be created was Retford Family Hub which opened as a design site in 2023. As part of the design, young people and families were asked whether they wanted a Family Hub, and what services they'd like to be available. One of the things they told us is the need for emotional health and well-being services to be more accessible locally, including one-to-one mental health support for young people.

Families said travel is a barrier to them accessing these services in Retford and that issues with transport potentially impact on waiting times to start getting support. Young people wanted to feel comfortable with their therapy environment (safe, confidential and not too clinical) and for family members to have a waiting area and parking close by.

As a result, Talkzone, a counselling and mental health service providing free, confidential support to children and young people aged 11 to 25 across Bassetlaw, was invited to provide appointments to young people in Retford at the town's Family Hub.

Nottinghamshire
**Family Hub
Network**



What difference has local access to counselling made to children and families in Retford?

Having Talkzone's services available in the Family Hub has been crucial in making sure young people and their families have access to counselling. The time a young person waits to see a counsellor has reduced because their individual needs can be met more locally. They can spend more time in school because of not needing to take so much time out to travel. Being in a community space, rather than a clinical setting, has helped young people to feel more comfortable and helped them to see it as a therapeutic space where, with time and support positive change can happen.

- 96% of young people who accessed Talkzone in Retford felt more able to deal with challenges on their own.
- 98% of young people said that accessing support from Talkzone had helped them overcome their problems to some degree.
- 98% of young people said that they felt the risk of their situation reaching crisis point had reduced because of Talkzone support.
- A high percentage of young people require no further professional support when their counselling comes to an end.

In the words of young people:

"I found it really useful to have a safe space to work through my worries and it was eye-opening to explore ways to manage/overcome these".

"Really good support. Helped me feel more confident and believe in myself. Helped me deal with my worries and anxiety a great deal".

Next steps

- The views and ideas of children and families continue to be central to the development of all 18 Family Hub Networks in Nottinghamshire.
- Family Hub Parent and Carer Panels are being set up across the hubs to help make sure that the views and experiences of children, young people, parents and carers are represented and have influence over the ongoing development and review of all the Family Hub Networks.

Contact at Retford Family Hub:

Annette.tutalo2@nottsgov.uk

Contact for co-production activity across Family Hubs:

una.daniel@nottsgov.uk



"It did become a safe zone for me to talk clearly".

"My worker made me feel extremely comfortable and listened to. The appointments have helped a lot with my mental health and how to cope".

Youth Voice activity championed by the Youth Service

Youth Voice is a cornerstone of the Youth Service which has a robust participation structure to enable young people to be heard and invoke change at a local and national level. Youth Voice is about enabling young people to channel views and opinions in a way that will get them heard. Young people are supported to learn how to debate, articulate their opinions appropriately, and have an awareness of their rights and responsibilities, equipping them with the skills to achieve their goals. The work of the Youth Service enables the voice of children and young people and their families to be heard and have an impact across many services as shown throughout this report.

What impact has this had on the development of services?

Budget consultation

Four hundred young people across the Youth Service took part in a survey to give their views and opinions on how budgets within the council should be spent. The impact of this was young people having the chance to express their ideas of what they need in their local communities. Fresh perspectives and innovative ideas influenced the budget plans. Young people felt empowered and gained a sense of social responsibility, therefore understanding the importance of social, economic, and environmental needs. They felt more connected to services that they use.



Period dignity - health and well-being

Nottinghamshire young people have raised concern around period dignity in clubs and forums. This was part of an effort from young people across the country and led to a debate in the House of Commons. This work has already made a positive impact by raising awareness, and youth services now have free period products available. Our youth forums will be continuing with this work locally and the hope is that this can become a national movement.

House of Commons

In 2025, Members of Youth Parliament had the opportunity to represent the views of young people in Nottinghamshire in the House of Commons. They contributed to debates on a range of important issues including minimum wage, transport, period dignity, votes at 16 and political education. Through their participation, they helped ensure that the perspectives of young people are considered in national decision-making.



Contact: amy.beckworth@nottscc.gov.uk

"Deepest thanks to everyone on the team who supported with the Parliamentary visit last week. Such a moment, so inspiring and what a privilege". (Parent)

"Thanks again so much for last Friday really was such a good day and an amazing experience". (Young person)

"It was a lifetime experience that I will cherish forever". (Young person)

Examples of how participation activities have made a difference

Thank you


For children, young people, parents and carers accessing family help and child protection services

Listening to and learning from families' experiences of Family Service support

The Family Service has been providing targeted early help support for families with worries and concerns, for example relating to conflict and meeting children and young people's emotional and behavioural needs. This includes direct support, advice, guidance and signposting.

The Family Service has been gathering feedback from families when their involvement ends to learn about what has been helpful and hear ideas for how their support could be improved. Jennifer, a parent, shared how valuable the service has been for her family and the difference it has made to them this year. This example evidences the positive impact it can have when practitioners from multi-disciplinary teams work in a holistic, strengths-based and solution-focused way with the whole family.

Contact: laura.moore@nottsgov.uk

"Hi, I just want to say thank you to the team for all the support we have received as a family. We still have a way to go but we are out of crisis. It has been a hard few months and as parents it has been hard to hold everything. With the right support we have managed to get in a better place and I hope this will continue.

Stronger Families - Sam, Sam and Nic- supported us throughout the hardest time and without them I really don't think I would be where I am right now.

Anna - Supported us with mediation. This was really needed and with support, Anna gave the backbone and safe space to make this happen.

Lucy and Elise - Thank you for the prep talk and encouraging me to attend nvr [non-violent resistance course].

NVR - Shelley and Jo - I was very angry and upset at the situation I was in and did not want to do nvr because I felt frustrated that I had tried the nvr strategies and it wasn't working. I reluctantly joined and I can honestly say that the facilitators made this enjoyable! Shelley was so giddy, happy and smiley and it really cheered me up when I saw her face. In the end I found myself less angry and upset and more confident. It gave me the validation and reassurance I needed. I will be forever grateful.

Jenny - Jenny gave space to be heard and a lot of reassurance. She held it all beautifully and was very thoughtful with the cin [child in need] meetings. They consisted of getting things moving and brought positivity to us. She made sure ourselves and our young person was heard and this had a really positive impact.

I just wanted to share my thoughts and to say a big thank you. Kind regards, Jennifer". (Parent)



Participation in the Youth Justice Service

The Youth Justice Service has been collaborating and engaging with children to make sure their voices are heard and they feel invested in the work of the service and the support it provides. Children and young people have taken part in youth participation activities and focused group consultation on both academic research and national policy development.

Who has been involved?

- 12 young people who have worked with the service are in the core youth participation group.
- 33% of the group are female.
- 17% are young people from ethnic minority backgrounds.
- 48 young people attended youth participation events in 2024-2025.
- Two parents presented their experiences of the engagement of their children and the challenges faced at a Youth Justice Service and partners day – feedback showed high satisfaction.

"J spends all his time waiting for a call from you to say the group is meeting up. It's about the only thing he's really in to. He's always talking to his new friends at the group but they live too far away for him to meet up with. J always talks about his night exercise in Sherwood Forest that he and his friend did for the youth service, he says it's the best thing he's ever done! Next year he wants to attend with his group as competitors". (Parent)

What difference has this made?

- Three Youth Justice Service Board meetings attended – young people made a valuable contribution to discussions around educational experiences, health needs and neurodiversity challenges faced by young people.
- One young person has been shortlisted for the Youth Power Awards 2025.
- There has been representation on the Leaders Unlocked programme supporting the Nottinghamshire Police and Crime Commissioner.
- Youth participation champions in each of the teams drive promotion and recruitment of more young people to get involved.
- Young people delivered a knife crime awareness challenge for other young people across Nottinghamshire throughout an overnight event called Shadow. They role-played an incident and provided information on the dangers of knives, first aid priorities and understanding the law. They connected with 70 young people through the night.

Next steps

2025 started with a group of young people visiting the Houses of Westminster to learn more about local democracy and campaign techniques. Youth participation will continue to be supported by the Service, including through their Youth Voice Panel.

Contact: mohammed.yaseen2@nottscc.gov.uk

Activity days for children and young people who have experience of child protection planning

To help strengthen relationships and support people who have experience of child protection planning to have a voice in helping improve services, the Strengths-based Practice Team and social care staff have continued to organise activity days. Building on the success of our first activity day in Mansfield in November 2023, further events have taken place at Perlethorpe Environmental Education Centre in April 2024, Beeston Young People's Centre in May 2024 and The Mill Adventure Base in August 2024.

In total 89 children and young people aged four to 16 years have taken part in a range of activities alongside their workers, including team, shelter and raft building, climbing, planting seeds, making dream catchers, doing crafts and playing games. Participants have learnt more about their right to be heard and been able to share their views and experiences. Four kinship carers also joined us at The Mill to cheer on the raft-builders and climbers and help enable the young people in their care to take part and have fun.



What difference have the activity days made?

Practitioners involved in the activity days have provided the following feedback about the impact the days had six months on.

- **Fostering new relationships:** the activity days allowed children to meet others in similar situations, make new friends and reduce feelings of isolation.
- **Building trust and rapport:** children saw a more approachable and fun side of their social workers, which helped build trust and rapport, making them more comfortable with the social work team. This improved direct work as children were more open. Spending quality time without the focus on social work activity strengthened relationships with children and their extended families.
- **Boosting confidence and identity:** children took part in some activities for the first time, including swimming, which boosted their confidence and gave them a sense of identity and belonging. The events also gave children a chance to express what they liked and disliked, allowing social workers to adjust their practice accordingly. It was a more natural setting for children to talk.
- **Positive shared experiences and improving relationships:** the days provided a positive shared experience for both children and parents/carers, helping to ease tensions and build positive relationships with social workers. Workers valued seeing groups of siblings in a different setting/away from home – where parents/carers and workers had seen negative interactions, at the events, they saw more positive bonds between the children when support with behaviour and interactions was offered.

- Parents/carers saw a more relaxed side of the service, understanding that social workers are there to benefit the children.
- They appreciated hearing that their children had been interacting positively with other children and social workers, which contributed to better relationships and understanding within families.
- The experience improved communication and helped families recognise that other local people also have support from services.
- Parents appreciated that their children were doing something nice with the workers.

"The child (who attended the activity day with me) has additional needs but he felt comfortable enough to share his voice at some of the points which was nice to hear. He even spoke about social care involvement in the car on the way home which was the first time he had acknowledged our involvement". (Social care worker)



Parent coffee mornings

We have continued to contact parents and carers after their children have attended activity days for feedback and the chance to meet with others.

What have parents said about the difference the activity days made?

- Chance to feel proud of their children (after hearing from workers about what their child had enjoyed and achieved).
- Opportunity for children to do activities the parents/carers couldn't provide.
- Being outdoors suited many of the children and enabled them to have less screen time on devices.
- Offered a break and time to recharge.
- Even when shy and nervous, their children attended and were able to participate.
- Appreciation that the team provided such a positive day, where child can feel fully part of everything.
- Parents felt confidence in their children being safe with their social worker, seeing them as trusted caregivers.
- All of the parents and carers said they would like more events like this.



"I think you should do more of these days, my children absolutely love coming, they're really happy and excited to talk to me about the day". (Parent)

"The day offered my children the opportunity to get out of the house with adults that I trust looking after them. I'm a typical mum who is struggling with no family support". (Parent)

What parents told us about their social care support:

"I actually feel blessed with having these workers, who have helped beyond what I could imagine. They have helped me in lots of ways - with children's behaviours, and my struggles with anxiety and depression, childhood trauma. I thought I was alone, but its breath of fresh air". (Parent)

"I understand why we are in the situation we are in, and I know what happened and why we have a social worker. I know who is doing what and why. We are all working together". (Parent)

What parents said about the coffee mornings...

All five coffee mornings created a similar environment:

- Safe, respectful, comfortable.
- Sharing experiences/struggles, they could relate to each other.
- Parents offered each other support, empathy and validation.



Next steps



- We have activity days planned for April and August 2025.
- Co-production sessions with young people who have experienced child protection planning are starting to take place during school holidays. The aim is to hear their ideas on we can best explain plans and processes, improve our support and co-design resources to help families better.
- We will continue to offer one-off coffee mornings following activity days.
- We started running 'monthly coffee mornings' in January 2025 for parents and carers to share their experiences after their plans with children's social care have ended and contribute into improvement activity. Our hope it that co-design opportunities arise from this.
- We will continue to ask and listen to the views of families throughout the time they are accessing family help and working with Family Support and Safeguarding Teams. We are talking to practitioners about how we can collectively learn from the experiences of families to identify where improvements can be made to the support and services we provide.

Contact: cfsstrengthsbasedpractice@nottscg.gov.uk

"I'd love to meet other parents with similar experiences. I feel judged about having a social worker". (Parent)

"You should be proud of what you're doing, I was miserable when I came, now I'm buzzing. This is good, no one judging you, you are who you are". (Parent)



Listening to and learning from families' experiences of Stronger Families Team Support

The Stronger Families Team aims to offer six weeks' worth of intensive support to children and their families where a breakdown in their living arrangements appears to be imminent. The team will work with the family to create their own support plan and find solutions through brief and intensive periods of intervention working with parents, young people and the family as a whole.

The team asks for feedback from families at the end of their involvement. The team describe the importance of this for them below...

Next steps

The Stronger Families Team will continue to gather feedback to inform and shape the development of the service.

Contact: karen.mistry@nottscg.gov.uk



"We hear from parents and young people so that we understand how our support has helped or what we could do differently.

We know that parents value our support in listening to them and to help them in understanding the trauma that their children have experienced and how this can impact on their behaviour. Parents also tell us that they value the work that we do about their own self-care.

Young people tell us that they enjoy doing activities that they didn't know they would be able to do.

They feel supported and motivated to go to school, college or follow their interests such as recording music, or doing activities with their parents/carers".



Listening to and learning from families' experiences of the kinship Support Service and the new Kinship Forum

Kinship Support Service

The Kinship Support Service provides support to kinship carers once there is a permanent arrangement in place for a child/young person to live with them. The Service of social workers, family workers and welfare rights officers offer targeted support, general advice and signposting to local or national support groups.

From the online feedback completed by families and young people, the Kinship Support Service has been able to measure the impact of their support:

- 100% of people have felt listened to by the Service and were satisfied by the support offered by them
- 100% of all kinship carers felt their own well-being had improved because of support offered
- 80% of carers felt their relationship with their child had improved
- 80% of carers felt their child's well-being had improved
- Overall, 80% of carers felt the Service had had a positive impact on their lives.

"If it wasn't for the kinship team, I wouldn't still be here caring for my granddaughter". (Chris, kinship carer, North Nottinghamshire)

Professionals fed back that the Kinship Support Service is a 'very responsive service', supporting the needs of kinship families 'extremely well'. One professional said '[the kinship family worker] was a credit to work with, I have never worked with Kinship support before and from this experience look forward to working with them in the future!'

Kinship Forum

The Kinship Forum launched in October 2024 for kinship carers wishing to have a voice and help shape services in Nottinghamshire and beyond. This has involved speaking to carers every two months on topics that they are passionate about. We have tried to create a space where we can achieve both 'quick wins' and 'aspirational' changes to services, guided by the people who know best - the kinship families themselves.

The impact of the Forum meeting has created the following quick wins, after suggestions from carers:

- A kinship mailing list
- A kinship newsletter
- An Easter family event in April 2025, where young people and carers will also be able to share their views about the team and other useful services and support.

Our aspirations as a forum:

- To create a wider kinship community who can support one another with babysitting, friendships and family time
- To have better informed schools who understand the needs of the kinship community - the team are working on some training for schools which will be co-designed with kinship carers.

Contact: lucyl.collier@nottsc.gov.uk

'[The forum is a] non-judgemental, safe space for carers'.
(Martin, kinship carer, North Nottinghamshire)



Examples of how participation activities have made a difference

For children in care and care leavers including unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

The Contact Service

The Contact Service runs six contact venues. Each venue has contact support workers who supervise and support family time to promote relationships when children are living away from their birth family. It provides time and space for children to see people who are important to them. It is for children and their families to have fun, make memories, and sometimes may contribute to a social worker's assessment and life story work for children. The service predominantly supports family time for children who are in care and/or involved in care proceedings.

How have people been involved?

During Listening and Learning Week 2024, the Contact Service ran engagement events and activities to gain the views of children, young people, parents, foster carers and staff, on how coming to family time makes them feel

and what they most enjoy. The Children in Care Council, also referred to as 'No Labels', supported by the Youth Service, fed back helpful ideas on how to engage children in the activities. Activities included picture-based "have your say" posters for children and parents, coffee mornings for foster carers, questionnaires for foster carers and social workers. Over all of the activities 63 children, 55 parents, 55 foster carers and 30 social workers took part.

What did the service learn?

Children, young people and parents felt happy coming to family time and requested some new resources, particularly for older children. Foster carers said the contact venues are difficult to find, gave a mixed response about how they felt about parents coming to their cars before and after family time and were unaware of waiting rooms. Social workers said communication is good but there is some inconsistency with recordings.



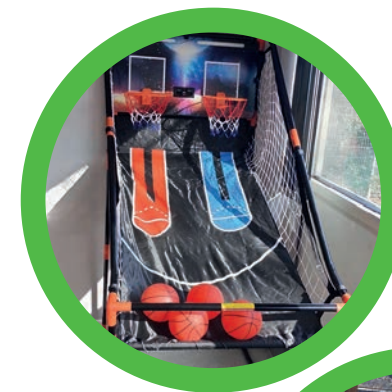
"The coffee morning for foster carers was very enjoyable it was nice to meet up with other carers and staff...the staff at Sandy Bank are helpful and friendly if you stay in the building you are offered a hot drink and biscuit it was nice to look around the building as we have been there many times but never looked round it - it's bigger then you think, we would like more of the coffee mornings it's a good partnership between us all". (Jackie, foster carer)

What impact has this had?

- New toys have been purchased resulting in excitement and improved behaviour and increased quality of family time.
- Children have enjoyed playing with the new music equipment.
- Maps to the contact centres have been improved.
- Change in practice for collecting children from foster carers cars implemented at the Priory Contact Centre.
- Foster carers informed via letter of the availability of waiting rooms – providing space for carers to meet and network.
- 'Back to basics' and legal team training given to staff to improve family time recordings.



New equipment for family time



Next steps

- More coffee mornings are going to be arranged.
- The service is exploring creative ways in which we can describe to families what to expect when attending family time. It is planned that any materials made will be co-produced with families.
- No Labels continue to be involved in discussions around how to involve young people in the design of a new contact centre.

Contact: sallyann.bradford@nottsc.gov.uk



The Local Offer

Last year's report referenced the contribution of young people in developing the Local Offer for Care Leavers.

What difference did this make?

The responses helped shape the Local Offer making this more valuable for care leavers. We are pleased that our updated Local Offer has been launched including:

- Achievement Local Offer
- Custody Local Offer
- Parenting Local Offer
- 21Plus Local Offer
- Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children Local Offer.

When No labels engaged unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in consultation at The Mill Adventure Base, they shared the following feedback:

- "I knew most of the information already"
- "Good to have it all in one place"
- "Feels good, explains everything"
- "Good to keep"
- "Important to have a copy as soon as possible".



Next steps

The 'Health Local Offer' is in the process of being developed.

Find out more: [Nottshelpyourself](#) | [Local Offer for Care Leavers](#)



National Care Leavers Week

To celebrate National Care Leavers Week in October 2024 the Leaving Care Service held an event at Mansfield Library. They had a fantastic turnout of around 25 care leavers. Young people shared powerful feedback about the invaluable support the service provides. Everyone was given ingredients to make a winter soup along with the recipe and instructions and provided the recipe book produced by our care leavers and staff to celebrate Care Leavers' Week in 2023.

Care leavers in No Labels have also shared what's most important to them about the support the Service provides. They said: "being there for us, budgeting, safety and clean housing, employment, being prepared to leave care, and having access to good advice on an ongoing basis".

Next steps

Feedback from care leavers is influencing what the 2025 event will look like and how they will continue to be supported. The voices of care leavers will also continue to be heard and represented through No Labels.

Contact for the Leaving Care Service:

rachel.stimson1@nottsc.gov.uk

Contact for No Labels:

emma.betteridge@nottsc.gov.uk

Members of No Labels have shared their thoughts about the difference a range of practitioners have made in their lives as children and young people who are looked after or care leavers. These quotes are a celebration of child and young person-focused and relationship-based practice. They also demonstrate the importance of involving young people in decisions which affect their lives, whether this is in relation to their individual plans of support or through influential forums such as No Labels. Audio recordings of young people sharing their views and needs in relation to foster care and schooling were played at the Foster Care Conference and shared with headteachers and education providers to shape their understanding. Ongoing work is underway by the Youth Service, Virtual School and No Labels to develop further resources, including a potential animation, to describe what helps young people who are looked after to feel supported and thrive in their education.



"My IRO (independent reviewing officer) is amazing because she goes above and beyond to help me, she checks up on me a lot to make sure I'm ok, I can talk to her about anything, and she gives me the best advice when I need it".
(Lacey, aged 14)

"Sometimes they (school councillor) will do a little check in with me every day and they also support me with my mental health, its great because he can be serious when needed but also have jokes and that feels really good, his support helps me to get my voice across and make decisions in school which are good for me".
(Dior, Age 15)

"Having a voice is about listening and being understood and it's important to have lots of ways to do this, one of the ways for me is being part of the Children in Care Council which has helped me to develop lots of skills and public speaking at the council staff and foster care training conferences. I have been part of the group for 10 years and I am now a care leaver and still actively involved in listening to other young people in care and making a real difference to myself and others by giving feedback on the services we receive".
(Jamie, Care Leaver, aged 22)

"It's been really good to be able to just go and speak to them (school support worker) when I need it, they are really supportive of me and I can really speak up and be heard, I can let all my emotions out which gives me a positive mind set for the rest of the day".
(Summer, Age 14)

"I think it's important for young people to be involved and give feedback, it can really change things from the view of a young person and what they would like to see happen in their areas and communities. I've been involved in reviewing and visiting various youth clubs across the county and having a real say on what works and what could be better which was awesome, I also attend the youth service link clubs and now I am a member of the Care Leavers Children in Care Council which gives a voice to care leavers experiences".
(Josh, Care Leaver, aged 21)

"My social worker really listened, like really listened and answered my e-mails, she involved me in decisions and understood my generation which is very important, and it helped me to feel valued and reassured".
(Dior, Age 15)

"I think that they (youth workers) are the best people in the universe, kind and caring, they make my day happy when I've had a bad day - they are always funny"!
(Summer, Age 14)

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people

In addition to the consultation work undertaken with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children by No labels, a youth worker has been appointed to work with this group of children and young people.

The youth worker ran a trial after-school session in Hucknall during the February half term in advance of running weekly sessions there. Five young people attended with their accommodation provider support workers which was a great start. The youth worker also met 16 young people at a residential arranged by the Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children's Team.

What difference has this made?

Relationships are being built and ideas for future activities have been shared. The young people were able to have a say in the design and delivery of future weekly sessions. The young people shared positive feedback about the half-term activity session.

Next steps

The work the youth worker has begun will support more asylum-seeking young people to access Young People's Centres and get involved in sharing their views and experiences to inform future activities.

Contact: neil.keighery@nottscg.gov.uk

Learning from our initial and review meeting feedback form



The initial and review meeting feedback form, launched in February 2024, provides all participants of child protection meetings, looked after children reviews, child exploitation meetings, child in need supervision order meetings, and any other statutory meeting for children in need of care and protection, with the opportunity to feedback on their experience following the meeting. Responses from the form have been helping us to find out what works well and how to improve children and families' experiences of, and outcomes from, these meetings.

What difference has this made?

- Involving children and young people, when appropriate, has made meetings feel more meaningful and focused on the child's needs.
- We have learnt that when meetings feel supportive and inclusive, it encourages parents, carers and professionals to take part, builds trust, promotes positive relationships and helps everyone work together.
- When communication is clear and thorough, everyone understands the purpose and process of the meetings, leading to more informed and effective decision-making for the child.
- We have found that taking a flexible approach to communication and the format of the meeting better meets the individual needs of children, young people and parents/carers. It keeps everyone more involved and focused on the needs of the child and their family network.
- We know that sometimes meetings feel very hard, and challenging conversations need to happen. We have learnt that when meetings are focused and respectful, we can make sure everyone's voices are being heard and considered, leading to better outcomes for the family.



Examples of how participation activities have made a difference

For children who have been adopted and their families

Adoption East Midlands is dedicated to empowering adopted young people. Recognising the profound impact of trauma and the complexities associated with emotional regulation, Adoption East Midlands aims to create safe environments where young people can express themselves and have their voices heard.



Young people's events and the role of the Voice of Adoption Forum

Central to Adoption East Midlands' youth engagement strategy are the young people's events, held throughout the year. These events provide adopted young people with a secure and supportive setting where they can build relationships, enhance their confidence and engage in meaningful activities. The sessions are designed to promote self-expression and social connection in a non-judgemental atmosphere. The Voice of Adoption Forum plays a vital role in making sure that young people have a direct voice in the design and delivery of events. Adoption East Midlands prioritises a peer-to-peer support model during these events, where young people uplift one another. This approach fosters leadership, mutual understanding and a strong sense of community. Forum members actively participate in shaping activities by providing feedback and suggestions and some assist in delivering the events. Adoption East Midlands is committed to enhancing this collaborative model as we move forward.

HAF Programme and residential experiences

Last year's Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme was instrumental in identifying the needs of adopted young people, offering them safe spaces to build confidence, develop social skills and engage in enriching activities. The residential experiences were particularly impactful, helping young people navigate their emotions, establish trust and cultivate a sense of belonging. Preparation days were also beneficial, allowing young people to feel comfortable before their stay.

Building on the success of last year, Adoption East Midlands is committed to delivering a similar experience this year with a different group of young people, ensuring that a wider range of individuals can benefit from these valuable opportunities.



Broader youth participation initiatives

Adoption East Midlands is also committed to ensuring that adopted young people are actively involved in shaping adoption services and broader youth engagement strategies through our Voice of Adoption Forum.

Key initiatives and the difference they made:

Adoption England event: young people contributed their perspectives to national discussions, ensuring their voices were heard by professionals and policymakers. They collaborated to create a presentation about their experiences of being adopted and the value of the Forum for themselves and others. They also facilitated a workshop based on the UK Youth Parliament's 'Make Your Mark' manifesto, linking national issues to the lived experiences of adopted young people.

Recruitment and selection: adopted young people have taken an active role as interviewers for adoption-related positions, helping to shape the workforce that supports them. They participated in recruitment training and provided valuable feedback to service managers, ensuring that their views are integrated into staffing decisions.



Adoption Panel questions: young people re-developed a set of questions for adoption panels, ensuring that their lived experiences inform decision-making. This initiative empowers young people to shape the perspectives of potential adoptive parents, fostering deeper understanding and meaningful dialogue.

Adoption Panel film: a short film created by young people presents key adoption panel questions in an accessible, youth-friendly manner, ensuring their voices are authentically represented.

Family short breaks consultation: young people contributed to shaping short break opportunities for adoptive families, ensuring that services reflect their needs and experiences. Their insights helped define desired outcomes, boundaries and perceived benefits of peer-to-peer support. They developed these ideas through discussion and art, creating a masterpiece to share with decision-makers and funders.



Young People's Board engagement: young people participate in broader youth consultations, ensuring their voices are represented in key decision-making processes. Elected representatives connect with the wider Young People's Board to amplify the needs and views of adopted young people.

School forums and the 'whole schools approach': Adoption East Midlands collaborates with educational institutions to foster a more inclusive and supportive approach for adopted young people. We are developing forums that engage both adopted young people and the wider school community to explore trauma-informed practices, staff training and enhanced educational plans.

Adoption East Midlands Youth Connect - Youth centre sessions: targeted sessions provide additional support, offering safe spaces for young people to explore their identities, experiences and aspirations. While similar to conventional youth centre sessions, these are tailored to address the specific challenges faced by adopted young people, fostering positive relationships and community building.

Feedback about young people's events from...

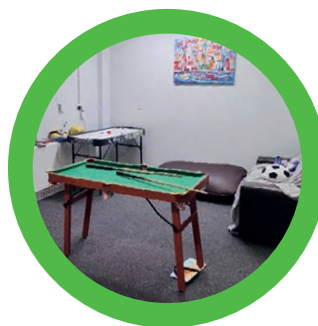
Young people:

- "It's important to come to events for adopted young people - there are too many reasons why it's important".
- "Something different to do, to see what it was like. It was good".
- "Just to have fun."
- "To not be on my PS4".
- "To make friends".
- "Learn new things".
- "The important reason why I came today is that I'm not the only person in the world who is adopted and coming to these events makes me feel real happy I'm not the only one". (similar feedback shared by others)
- "Absolutely amazing day".
- "This was the greatest day ever".



Feedback from parents:

- “Mixing with people who get it”.
- “Nice meeting other families”.
- “We loved everything”.
- “Networking and meeting other families”.
- “A fantastic day out”.
- “Really enjoyed the drumming and was a good range of different activities. The baking always goes down very well 😊 Lovely opportunity to meet and speak to other adopters and children, and for connecting with staff also”.
- “We always have a lovely time at the events. There is always a really good variety of activities to entertain the children and get them interacting. As we have now attended a few of the events we meet people we have met before which is really nice and the opportunity to talk to parents and staff who understand is so wonderful”.
- “The event was wonderful, my girls loved everything about it as did I”.
- “Was great for them to play freely with other children and for the adults to also get chance to talk”.



- “It was great to have a younger adult / teenager that my children could really relate to and connect to a positive role model. She was so attentive”.
- “We really enjoyed it thank you. There was a nice range of activities for the children. My boys had a great time. It was very handy being introduced to another parent who had recently moved to the area- we have kept in touch and are planning a playdate”.
- “Thought it was brilliant and that this sort of event is really important as prior to this one I didn't know any local adoptive parents and do want my boys to know other children who are adopted”.

Contact: aimee.sharpe@adoptioneastmidlands.nottscg.gov.uk



Peers4Peers

Adoption East Midlands has also been busy creating a network of experienced adopters who can share their knowledge and expertise to help adoptive families in need of support.

They have been working alongside experienced adopters and Adoption UK to gain a greater depth of understanding about the lived experience of an adoptive family, adoptive parents and their children. Together they have been able to think about the key areas of support and advice that adoptive parents need.

Peers4Peers, launched in Autumn 2024, is a peer support service within Adoption East Midlands created and run by adopters for adopters. They have recruited volunteer adopter peer mentors who feel passionate about sharing their lived experience.

Their aim is to:

- create a community to provide informal peer support
- offer various forms of peer support including mentoring, recognising the bravery it takes to seek help
- value the lived experiences of our adopters, prioritising the real-life experiences of our community
- create a community that is supportive, listens to others and 'just gets it!'



What difference has this made?

Adoptive families have begun to network and find support through the group.

Adoption East Midlands' Complex Trauma Co-Production Group have created a comprehensive guide called 'Peer Reflections on School Residentials'. This document offers valuable insights and practical tips to help families and schools support children during school trips.

Next steps

Peers4Peers will continue to link adopters with peer mentors and run regular coffee mornings for Adoption East Midlands adopters to connect with one another. They also have lots of events and activities planned in 2025 for children, young people and families to take part in. The lived experiences of adoptive families will continue to be central to the ongoing development of the service.

Contact: Peers4peers@adoptioneastmidlands.nottscg.gov.uk



Examples of how participation activities have made a difference

For children and young people with special education needs and disabilities (SEND), and their families

Children, young people, parents and carers have been involved in SEND improvement focused co-production activities and consultation processes and have led improvement projects across the SEND partnership.

We are proud of the development of [Our outcomes-based strategy for children and young people with SEND in Nottinghamshire, 2024-2027](#).

The strategy sets out the local area SEND partnership's vision, outcomes and key actions to improve the lived experiences of children and young people with SEND and their families.

The strategy was shaped by the views of over 160 children and young people with SEND and is framed by personal impact statements.

Our children and young people and their families, want these outcomes and we are committed to doing everything we can to enable this to happen.

Our outcomes for children and young people with SEND in Nottinghamshire



Other ways parents, carers, children and young people been involved

Strategic influence:

- Our Parent Carer Forum has been established as a strategic partner within our new SEND partnership arrangements and governance structures.
- Parents and carers are represented on our decision-making boards such as the Partnership Assurance Improvement Group (PAIG) and the SEND Executive Leadership Group.

Leading and supporting specific projects:

- The Parent Carer Forum led on the 'Review into the arrangements regarding children and young people on parttime timetables – report and recommendations, September 2024'.
- Parents and carers are leading the rollout of the Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) project across 39 Nottinghamshire schools.



- They have been involved in multi-agency arrangements to explore how we can better meet the needs of children with complex health needs in education settings and transport.
- A total of 43 parents, carers and young people have been directly involved in shaping our new SEND journey map - our refreshed multi-agency graduated response document. Their experiences and ideas for improvement have been incorporated into the development of the map.

Next steps

- We want to build on the progress we have made by including the voices of more children, young people, parents and carers to represent the full range of experiences for Nottinghamshire families.
- We will continue improving our co-production approach with children and families so that it is clear how their views have informed SEND provision and what we have done in response to their engagement.
- A new co-production officer for children and young people with SEND and their families was appointed in January 2025 to support us to do this.
- Pioneers with the support of the Youth Service will continue to represent the voices of young people with special educational needs and disabilities.
- The Youth Service, co-production officer and Pioneers are thinking about ways we could hear and learn from the voices and experiences of younger children, for example, through our other youth settings and our connections with schools.

Contact our Co-production officer for SEND: jeanette.hallam@nottscc.gov.uk

Contact for Pioneers: amy.beckworth@nottscc.gov.uk

Reflections from the chair of Pioneers Youth Forum

As chair of the pioneers forum, I feel it is a great opportunity for young people with disabilities to have their say on issues that affect them and offer information and advice to others from a disabled young person's perspective.

Having lived experience of my own disability and as a Nottinghamshire resident and a young person I believe that it is key that children, young people and families are offered the chance to get help and support for as long as it's needed.

During my time taking part in the pioneers forum, I feel I have been given the chance to put forward ideas and give feedback on established ideas. My most memorable projects and campaigns include being part of the process looking at the new building in Bellamy Road Estate, where I got to meet contractors to ask questions about accessibility, my involvement in youth club visits where I was able to see youth centres in various locations around the county to offer feedback and other project that involved discussing how information from Nottinghamshire County Council can be more accessible to young people.

I recognise that to improve and grow it's necessary that the people who are most impacted are acknowledged and listened to. The work of the pioneers forum is ongoing and we accept that it takes time for changes to be implemented so we will keep offering our opinion.

Will Hickman



Supporting children and young people to have a voice through advocacy and befriending

Advocacy Services are independent services aimed at helping people understand their rights and express their views. They help people to be involved in the decisions that affect their lives.

What difference has advocacy and befriending made for young people this year?

Over the past year the Change Grow Live service has supported young people to take part in lots of fun activities including go-karting and a trip to Nottingham Goose Fair!

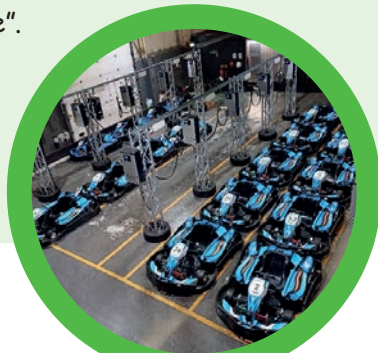
"This is cool".

"We need to do this next year".

"I've got sweaty hands from excitement and nerves".

"It's spinning fast like a washing machine".

"Young people laughed the whole time we were on the ride and when we were asked to 'scream if you want to go faster!' young people let out the biggest screams".



Young people have also been supported to grow in confidence and have a voice in decisions about their lives. One worker was proud that the young person they have been working with had felt able to talk about their family, including how she missed them and what she had found hard about the time she had spent with them. She had also contributed to decision making about her life despite this being something they struggled with.

Next steps

Following a joint recommissioning process with Nottingham City, from 1 April 2025, the Children and Young People's Advocacy and Befriending Service will be provided by The Children's Society.

No Labels played a valuable role in the commissioning process by reviewing and assessed applications for the advocacy contract.

We are pleased that the new service will provide a greater offer with more advocacy provision available for children and young people who are looked after and living in supported accommodation, unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people, care leavers and young people on child in need and child protection plans. This is an important step to providing better advocacy and befriending for a range of young people who may benefit from this.

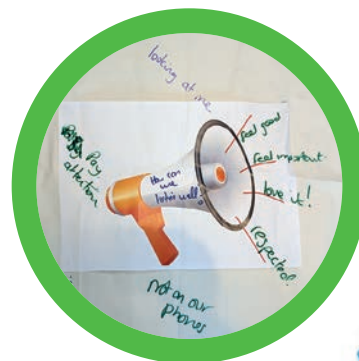
Contact: jasmine.wayman@nottscc.gov.uk



Top tips for working with children and young people

Across different participation activities, children and young people have shared consistent messages about the best way adults can listen to them and support them. They have provided these top tips:

- build trust
- have shared respect
- be there for us
- speak to us alone and with our parents/carers
- give us space, wait and take time
- let us talk
- pay attention
- offer reassurance
- listen to our actions as well as our words
- keep to commitments and promises or explain why you can't
- tell us who we can contact to speak to when you're not available
- show love and kindness
- pay attention to the big things but also the little things can feel equally important at times
- remember we can't always find the words and need help
- respect silence



Young people said how important 'calm' is when it comes to listening and learning. One young person powerfully said...

"Everything good can come from a place of calm, like feeling ok, good choices, talking, working this out, getting things done, communication and understanding". (Member of No Labels)



Top tips for working with parents and carers

In addition to the learning taken from activities previously described, we have been seeking feedback from parents and carers throughout the year as part of quality of practice reviews. Quality of practice reviews help us to understand how effective we are in helping and protecting children, and in improving the experiences and progress of children and young people in care and of care leavers.

Parents and carers have shared what helps them and what could change for the better. The learning is relevant for all practitioners working with children and families. It helps us to know what we should keep doing to make a positive difference and when we need take steps to improve the support and services we provide.

What is going well?

- Building powerful, supportive relationships
- Feeling informed and having questions answered promptly
- Having support to resolve issues and problems
- Getting support to access formal therapy and help
- Experiencing improved family relationships through the support provided
- Practitioners listening and considering everyone's thoughts.



What would you change?

- Not having to repeat our story
- Visits being planned well ahead
- Practitioners visiting when they say they will
- Less of a 'tick box' approach and not asking the same questions on every visit
- Take a balanced approach
- Practitioners working equally with both parents
- Practitioners providing explanations of what to expect
- Having cover arrangements in place and someone to contact when practitioners are off on annual leave or due to sickness.

Next steps

Improvement activities are now being tracked through Practice Improvement Meetings and an action plan. We are doing this to make sure we are putting the learning into action and that positive changes to practice are being made, leading to better outcomes for children and families.



Our aspirations and plans for the year ahead

- ✓ The Children and Families Participation Network will continue to meet termly to help put into action Our Approach to Participation with children, young people and families, celebrate what is happening, share learning, and make sure that people's voices are having an influence.
- ✓ The Strengths-based Practice Team continue to support teams, including those which began participation activities during Listening and Learning Week in October 2024.
- ✓ We continue to review the way we gather learning from individual children and families so that this has an impact on improving the experiences and outcomes of other children and their families. This will involve strengthening connections and communication with key influencers and decision makers, including the Children and Families Department's extended leadership team and the lead cabinet member for Children and Families. We want to support them with their roles and our responsibility to listen to children, young people, parents and carers when things are going well and when gaps in the service have been identified and there are opportunities for improvements.
- ✓ The Strengths-based Practice Team are beginning to gather more information about how teams and services are listening and learning through the completion of 'Listening and Learning Loops'. The tool is designed to 'close the loop' and make sure that feedback from children, young people and their families informs decision-making and service improvements. We are encouraging teams to share their completed Loops with the Strengths-based Practice Team so that they and the wider Participation Network can offer support where needed and identify where learning could be shared more widely across services.
- ✓ Our new co-production officer for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and their families has begun networking with existing parent and carer groups, including Nottinghamshire Parent Carer Forum and supporting participation and co-production activities with these families. The officer is looking into improved mechanisms to collate pupil voice and has hopes to strengthen the collective of voices of children and young people and their families, so that their views and experiences are valued and make a difference.
- ✓ The Youth Service will enhance its participation structure by creating connections between secondary school youth councils and their respective district and borough youth councils. Pioneers will develop links with special educational needs schools.
- ✓ We are taking part in the Family Voices Project led by Safe Lives, who have been asked by the national government to undertake research into how we can best support families to have a say in how early help programmes are developed, so that they can be of most use to the families that use them. This will help the Department for Education to share the good practice with all councils across England and Wales. Safe Lives will be highlighting examples of where we are doing a good job of listening to children, young people, parents and carers, and making sure these views and experiences are influencing decisions and improvements to new and existing early help programmes. We hope to also learn from others.
- ✓ Our aspiration is that the culture of listening and learning continues to grow, and practitioners and managers are supported to involve children and families in co-designing services and support. This approach will be central to the Nottinghamshire Families First for Children programme.

Appendix 1:

Key terms and description of local participation activities included in the voice, influence and change activity map (not previously described)



Consultation

Children, young people, parents and carers have broad interests and concerns and have opinions on all issues that affect their community. Consulting with people about a range of relevant issues helps us to:

- understand new and unique perspectives (lived experiences)
- make better, more informed decisions
- provide more suitable services and events
- strengthen community connections.

Participation

Participation means children, young people, families and carers with experience of using Nottinghamshire services taking part in decisions that affect their lives. It is about people being listened to, respected and valued.

Co-production

Our vision is for more of our services, policies and strategies across the Nottinghamshire to be developed with people with experience of services, our staff and other stakeholders, working together as equals from start to finish. This is co-production. Co-production means involving people in decisions that affect their lives and working with them to design, deliver and evaluate support and services. It is about a meeting of minds to find shared solutions. It is sharing power and responsibility, building on people's skills and experience and recognising that everyone has something valuable to contribute.

Participation activities focused on the individual:

Pathway Plans for looked after children and care leavers

All looked after children are supported to develop a 'Pathway Plan' when they reach 16 to help prepare them for leaving care. This includes the plans for the young person's health, education, training and development, the contact with their family, money and the support they will get with these. Personal advisors take part in Pathway Plan reviews with the young person until they are 21 or 25, if they would like continued support. The young person's views are central to their plan.

Personal Education Plans for looked after children

Every child and young person in care (three to 18 years) must have a personal education plan. The plan records the child or young person's education and training, describing what needs to happen to allow them to reach their goals. Plans should be a co-production activity, developed and reviewed termly with the child or young person, their education setting, carers and other professionals. It should include the child or young person's views and describe the journey of their education.

Participation in multi-agency meetings and reviews

Multi-agency meetings and reviews provide a space for all professionals supporting a child, young person and their family to meet to discuss what is going well, the support they are offering and anything which is needed to help improve things. It is important that the voices of children, young people, parents and carers are heard in these meetings so that effective support can be offered to build on the family's strengths.

Direct work/life story work

Direct work is time that is spent with a child or young person for a specific purpose. The focus of the time might be to understand what life is like for the child or young person, explore their memories of events, help them to process traumatic experiences, talk about a significant change in their life or to understand their wishes and feelings about their plan. For children and young people to get to know their worker(s), they need time to build a relationship and trust. Direct work can be done through conversations, play and other creative ways, supporting children who are both verbal and non-verbal to express their views, wishes and feelings. Life story work is when workers help children and young people to understand their life journey.

Home/establishment visits

Home visits are where a professional visits a family or young person where they live. They provide an opportunity for children, young people and families to share their views and ideas about the support they are receiving, how this might be helping them and anything that could be improved. It is important that we learn from these conversations so that we know what is working well and try to make changes when we hear that things could be better. Establishment describes when a worker might visit a child outside of their home, but in another place they are living or spending time in such as their school, hospital, a secure unit or prison.

Reports for meetings and reviews

When practitioners are working with children and young people who have a plan of support, they sometimes write a report for the meeting or review. A key part of the report will be describing the views, wishes and feelings of the children or young people, their parents or carers and other important people in their lives.

Pupil voice

The term pupil voice means the views and experiences of children and young people which are shared and heard in the context of their education setting. We want children and young people to have a strong collective voice around matters that are important to them. We know that children and young people are more likely to share and talk about the things which are important to them with the people they have strong relationships with. We want to work with education providers to hear what matters to the pupils in their establishments so that we can learn from this, and make sure these views and experiences inform how we design and improve support and services. For example, services for children and young people with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and their families. This includes what we learn from the body language and emotional and behavioural responses of pupils, as well as what they tell us verbally, especially when children and young people are non-verbal or struggle to verbalise their feelings and views.

Views shared with foster and residential carers

Foster and residential carers are keen to understand the views, wishes and feelings of the children and young people they care for. They are asked to support children and young people to talk about their views and wishes or share them on their behalf. The views of carers are valued when important decisions are being made.

Family decision making meetings and family group conferences

Family networking is about involving people who know and care about children and their family when they need help. This might include family members, friends and other important people to the family. Support will be offered to families to arrange a decision-making meeting involving these people.

A family group conference is a family-led meeting where the family and friends network coming together to make a plan for the child or young person and their family. The process is supported by a co-ordinator who helps prepare the family for the meeting. In Nottinghamshire the Family Service help facilitate family group conferences.

Education, health and care plans

An education, health and care plan is a legal document which describes a child or young person's special educational needs, the support they need, and the outcomes they would like to achieve. The plan looks at all the needs that a child or young person has within education, health, and care. Professionals and the child, young person and their family together consider what outcomes they would like to see for the child or young person by the end of a key stage and the plan identifies what is needed to achieve those outcomes. The views of the child or young person and their family are central to the plan.

Supervision and employee development reviews

Supervision is when a worker meets with their manager to talk about their work. For practitioners working directly with families, this will include talking about children, young people and families they are working with, what is going well and the plan for support moving forward. The views, wishes and feelings of the family are a key part of these discussions.

Participation activities focused on service/team learning:

Holiday Activities and Food Programme family consultation

The Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF) supports the well-being of children between 5 to 16 years by providing a variety of activities and food during school holidays. It offer activities and food for children who receive benefits-related free school meals during the Spring (Easter), Summer, Autumn (October) and Winter (Christmas) holidays across the county. Some of the activities involve families so that we can hear about their experiences and consult with them on important matters relating to services, support and spaces families use across Nottinghamshire.

Empowering People Empowering Communities

The Empowering Parents, Empowering Communities (EPEC) programme is an internationally recognised evidence-based peer-led parenting programme. The programme provides a system for training and supervising parent-led parenting groups that help parents to learn practical parenting skills for everyday family life and develop their abilities to bring up confident, happy and co-operative children.

Nottinghamshire Parent/Carer Forum

Nottinghamshire Parent/Carer Forum is a registered charity run by, and for, parents/carers of children and young people with an additional need and/or disability. Its purpose is to be the voice of these families, to gather their views and experiences, and then work in partnership with Nottinghamshire County Council and other providers in education, health and social care to help shape and improve support and services. Forum representatives are actively involved in the local area's governance structure to ensure that parents, carers

and their children are at the centre of the decision-making process. The chair of the forum is a member of the Special Education Needs and Disabilities Improvement Board and SEND Executive Leadership Group. There are also three parent/carer members on the Nottinghamshire SEND Partnership Assurance and Improvement Group.

Care leavers' coffee mornings/drop-ins

Care leavers' coffee and cake drop-ins are monthly informal meetings for care leavers aged 21 to 24. They are hosted by the Leaving Care Service 21-plus Team and form part of the team's activities to listen to young people's views to inform and influence what the service does. Young people are also able to share their views in response to a bi-monthly e-newsletter.

Fostering hubs

Fostering hubs provide a space for foster carers to come together for peer support. The views of carers are also able to be shared back through their workers and through the Foster Liaison Advisory Group.

Foster Liaison Advisory Group

The Foster Liaison Advisory Group is an opportunity for foster carers to come together to network in a supportive environment. Meetings of the Network take place quarterly and are attended by foster carers and members of the fostering service.

Wishing walls

All young people's centres have a wishing wall that enables young people to put forward ideas and thoughts through completing a suggestion slip. Workers will complete a response and display the form on the wishing wall. Some will require discussion at the Young People's Centre Management Committee.

Residential homes voice groups

Residential homes in Nottinghamshire are keen to listen and learn from the young people who live in them. Each home provides opportunities for young people to share their views and ideas on how the home can be run in the best way possible, to try and make sure that everyone living there can be safe, happy, healthy and have fun.

Adoption East Midlands co-production groups

Adoption East Midlands provides a range of support services for adoptive families, adopted adults and birth families, designed to offer the right level of support at the right time throughout their adoption journey. They have been running themed co-production groups to learn from the experiences of adopters and look at how services could be improved to better meet the needs of adopters and the children and young people in their care.

Complaints, compliments and suggestions

We want to hear views about our service, good or bad. What people tell us helps improve services and plan. We continue to review how we can learn from feedback and complaints so that we know and can continue to provide support and services which are helpful and try and change things when improvements are needed.

Young People's Centre Management Committees/Steering Groups

Youth workers ensure that young people are given the opportunity to influence and shape the provision they access through management committees. Membership is open to all, young people set the agenda and decide where and when meetings take place. Youth workers will share any relevant information to their District and Borough Youth Forum. Young people are also encouraged to attend their local District and Borough Youth Forums.

Spaces where the focus of the group is on learning from people and enabling change with a primary focus on participation:

Young People's Board

The Young People's Board meets six times a year in Nottinghamshire County Councils chambers. It is made up of the Members of Youth Parliament, representatives from No Labels, Voice of Adoption Forum, District and Borough Youth Forum chairs and vice chairs, Pioneers chair and vice chair. The agenda is set by young people with senior officers and elected members invited to attend. They will evaluate expressions of interests, campaign work is discussed and debates on proposed work and issues takes place.

Children in Care Council 'No labels' and sub-groups

Our Children in Care Council 'No Labels' meets six times a year and has several representatives from the subgroups. The meeting is chaired by young people and involves senior officers and elected members. Young people share current projects and pieces of work that they have been involved with along with raising issues.

No labels and the subgroups provide forums for young people who are looked after to be listened to and have an active role in shaping the services affecting them. The subgroups are:

- Looked after Play consultation 3 to 7 Years
- Looked after Junior subgroup 8 to 12 Years
- Looked after Senior subgroup 13 to 17 Years
- Leaving Care subgroup 18 to 25 Years

The subgroups meet and engage young people in consultation, develop artwork, produce videos, provide opportunities to learn life skills, share their experiences and influence changes to the services they access.

District and Borough Youth Forums, and Pioneers (Youth Forum for young people with a disability)

District and Borough Youth Forums support Members of Youth Parliament in representing the views of the young people they represent. The District Youth Forums and the Pioneers forum enable the Members of Youth Parliament to support the local and specific needs of groups and individuals in their area whilst feeding back on national campaigns and issues. Localised and specific expression of interests will be presented at these meetings. There will be a minimum of six meetings a year. Forums will arrange additional meetings to move forward specific projects. Young people between the ages of 10 to 19 can attend the District and Borough Youth Forums and up to the age of 24 for Pioneers.

Youth Service expression of interest process

The expression of interest (Eoi) process is a mechanism which enables internal and external services to engage with young people and hear their views about the provision they receive or are affected by. It provides an opportunity for young people to offer insight into how changes can be made to better meet their needs or make improvements to services.

The Eoi process provides an opportunity for co-production, participation, and engagement, and offers an effective way to ensure young people's views are heard and incorporated into service design and delivery. Each Eoi submitted is reviewed by the Young People's Board allowing them to take ownership of the agenda, establish the information required and the time needed to enable their active involvement, they then determine the next steps of engagement.

The expression of interest forms can be accessed here:

- [Expression of interest for young people's engagement and consultation 2025-2026](#)
- [Expression of interest to involve young people in interviews 2025-2026](#)

Interviews, visits and inspections

Through the expression of interest process young people are asked to take part in mystery shopper inspections, critical friend reviews of services or to sit on interview panels. If the EoI is approved, youth workers will then develop training packages to support this work. Opportunities for young people to attend workshops are then provided before commencing this work.



Spaces where learning from participation activity is/can be shared with people who can help influence the development of services, teams and practice locally:

Select Committee and Cabinet

Cabinet and Cabinet members make many decisions about Council services. Select Committee scrutinises the effectiveness of services for children and families to support improvement. Part of the role of the lead Cabinet member for children's services is to listen to children, young people, parents and carers in order to identify gaps in service or service improvements.

Learning and Improvement Board

Learning and Improvement Board has the responsibility to ensure that the Children and Families Department meets its regulatory and corporate requirements. The board makes sure that there is effective leadership, management, and operations across the department. The ultimate vision for the Board is that we are consistently ambitious to achieve excellence for our services, so we have the best outcomes for children and young people.

Senior Leadership Team/Extended Leadership Team

The Senior Leadership Team is the four Children and Families Department Directors and Corporate Director. The Extended Leadership Team is the group of people who are responsible for planning, delivering and evaluating the effectiveness of children and family services in Nottinghamshire. They are keen to champion Our Nottinghamshire Approach and help embed a culture of listening and learning across the department.

Practice Improvement Meetings

The group of managers and practitioners/practice leads who attend practice improvement meetings have a responsibility to understand the quality of practice and services, and children and families' experiences. They are responsible for making sure that the support and services families receive is good and improving the quality of practice when this could be better. Practice improvement meetings take place with a focus on children and young people in need of help, protection and care and for children, young people and families accessing support through the Integrated Children with Disabilities Service.

Corporate Parenting Panel

The Corporate Parenting Panel was established to assist the council in fulfilling its legal corporate parenting duties and ensure the council and partner agencies act as effective corporate parents. The panel will invite members of the Children Looked After and Care Leavers Partnership Board, the Foster Carers Liaison Group and No Labels to attend meetings and input.

Transformation and change programmes

We have several transformation and change programmes across the Children and Families Department which support improvement activity, including the Nottinghamshire Families First for Children Programme. What children, young people and families have already told us about what works well and how things could be improved is being fed into our transformation and change programmes. We are now reviewing how we can effectively build on our existing participation structures so that we can do more co-design work with children and families. We want to make sure that the way our services are set up truly meets the needs of people in the local area.

Safeguarding Assurance and Improvement Group

The Safeguarding Assurance and Improvement Group sits beneath the Strategic Leadership Group and meets four times a year. Membership of this group includes senior representatives from the safeguarding partners and relevant agencies that have key safeguarding performance responsibilities. The Group is led by the independent scrutineer and is responsible for scrutinising safeguarding effectiveness and the coordination of improvement activities.

Nottinghamshire SEND Partnership Assurance and Improvement Group

The SEND Partnership Assurance and Improvement Group's purpose is to be assured that the lived experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND and their families are maximised. The Group monitors and ensures improved performance of SEND services across Nottinghamshire and that these improvements are linked to the lived experiences and outcomes for children and young people.



Spaces participation activity has a strategic focus with a broader influence wider than Nottinghamshire:

Members of UK Youth Parliament (MYP)

The UK Youth Parliament is supported by funding from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. Young people aged 11 to 18 are elected by young people to represent Nottinghamshire for two years. The role involves listening to marginalised groups, organising events, making films, meeting MPs and local councillors, lobbying for change, organising campaigns, appearing in the media, all to amplify the views of their peers.

As a member of Youth Parliament, they will take part in several events. This ends with priority issues being debated by members from across the country when they take over the House of Commons for a day.

Make Your Mark

Make Your Mark gives all young people aged 11 to 18 in the UK the chance to have a say on the biggest issues facing young people. Supported by over 780 schools, colleges, youth groups, and Councils it informs the debates our members of youth Parliament hold in the House of Commons. It also shapes local campaigns across Nottinghamshire. In 2024 over 12,000 young people in Nottinghamshire responded to Make your Mark.

[British Youth Council | Make Your Mark - UK Youth Parliament \(byc.org.uk\)](https://byc.org.uk)



**Nottinghamshire
County Council**

W nottinghamshire.gov.uk/education/our-nottinghamshire-approach-to-participation
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