

**FOSTER
FOR
KENT**

**Adoption
Partnership**
South East



Corporate Parenting Annual Report



2025



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Message from the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services: Christine Palmer



Welcome to the Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2025 which highlights the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel and our services to children in care and care experienced adults.

As the new Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, I strongly support and endorse the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel. Officers, elected members and partner agencies play an important role, in providing the best possible care and safeguarding all children and young people who are looked after by Kent County Council.

In June 2025, newly elected members received an induction on Corporate Parenting Services and what it means to be a good corporate parent. As the lead member I have enjoyed meeting the children in care and our care leavers, at a variety of activity days and celebrating their achievements at the Virtual School Kent Award Ceremonies. Many of the children and young people in our care have faced challenges in their early life and all members of the Corporate Parenting Panel share the ambition that they get the best possible support to go on to live happy, successful and independent lives. I am proud of all our young people, and it is a privilege to work with them. I would like to thank the Officers, Members and especially our young people for their outstanding contribution to the work of the Panel.

Message from the Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting: Caroline Smith



It is with great pleasure I introduce our 2025 Annual Report for the corporate parenting services at Kent County Council. I am very proud of the 1,966 children and young people in our care and the 2,039 young adults who are care experienced. Over the last year, it has been an absolute privilege to join the services to celebrate children, young people and our staff's achievements at a variety of activity days, award ceremonies, conferences and service days. We continue to be aspirational for our children and young people and support them in every way we can, to be the best corporate parents we can be.

The Local Government Reform will see national changes to the way children in care and care experienced adults are supported. Kent County Council joined other Local Authorities to work together to address the national shortage of foster carers and other types of local care provision for children in care. In 2025, Kent County Council successfully opened both small residential children's homes and supported accommodation for our unaccompanied asylum-seeking children through the Reception and Safe Care Services. The 18+ Care Leavers Service developed and registered with Ofsted the Kent Supported Homes, our in-house service offering supported accommodation for 16- and 17-year-olds in a family environment. The Kent Fostering Service embedded the Kinship Service, developed to assess and support kinship arrangements to ensure children can be cared for within their birth family or local community wherever it is safe to do so.

About Us

The role of the Corporate Parenting panel is to lead on, and ensure, the corporate parenting roles and responsibilities of the council are being met. A county councillor cabinet member chairs the panel, this position is currently held by Pamela Williams. It is the responsibility of all members, not just the lead members for children's services, to be a corporate parent by ensuring our children receive the right support to enable them to reach their full potential. At Kent County Council, we take our moral duty as well as our statutory responsibilities to our children and young people seriously. We will continue to strive to improve our services so that our children and young people can experience independent and fulfilling lives by providing safe and nurturing care. Good corporate parents, just like all good parents, need to understand and know what is happening to their children and young people. In Kent, this means continuing our improvement journey in ensuring the information that all agencies collect about children in care and care leavers is used to the best advantage, sharing information with each other appropriately. Performance data for children in care and care leavers are reported to the corporate parenting panel for scrutiny, oversight and future work planning to help ensure improved management of performance and outcomes delivered by our services as well as ensuring our children are not disadvantaged by their characteristics or background.

Kent County Council (KCC) works to be the best corporate parent to our children and young people by following these key principles:

- To act in the best interest and promote the physical, mental health and wellbeing of those children and young people.
- To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- To consider the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
- To help those children and young people to gain access to, and make the best use of, the services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
- To promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes for those children and young people.
- To ensure those children and young people are safe and have stability in their home lives, relationships, education, and workplace.
- To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

Our corporate parenting panel and corporate parenting services are overseen by the Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting, Caroline Smith, and comprise of four key services: Kent Fostering including the Kinship Service, Adoption Partnership Southeast (APSE), Total Placement Service (TPS) and 18+ Care Leavers Service which includes our in house supported accommodation service Kent Supported Homes.

The services form part of the overall countywide services for children and young people, reporting to the Director for Children's Countywide Services, Kevin Kasaven. Corporate parenting works closely with Virtual School Kent (VSK), children's early help and social work teams, health, education, youth justice and our key partners including the Young Lives Foundation (YLF) and Kent Association of Foster Carers (KAFC).

Our services report into the corporate parenting panel who meet six times per year and, alongside elected members and staff officers, the panel has a wide range of independent members including foster carers, the designated nurse for children in care, Chair of Kent Housing Group and YLF.

Following a previous challenge children and young people wanted to attend panel without having to miss out on their education, we ensure some panel dates are planned around school holidays to facilitate this. In June 2025, Corporate Parenting completed an induction to the services, for the newly elected members, with a new Chair, Pamela Williams, being elected in July 2025.

Members of the panel are invited to attend celebration events, award ceremonies and activity days to meet the children and young people for whom they are a corporate parent. In 2025, we held a wide variety of events to celebrate. Our children and young people's corporate parenting panel includes a cabinet member update.

Performance Scorecard

The scorecard is presented regularly to enable the panel to monitor key targets and statutory requirements. For 2025, targets were in the majority maintained within an amber or green rating across the key performance indicators. However, the increased numbers of new arrivals of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children significantly impacted upon three areas, where performance is within the red, below the required target.

- **% of Initial Health Assessment competed within 20 working days of child entering care.**
The health target for completion of the Initial Health Assessment within the statutory timescale is below the required target due to the demand in numbers of newly arrived unaccompanied children. Performance for this target is monitored monthly with health colleagues and there should start to be an improvement over the winter months, as demand decreases.
- **Placements within 20 miles of child's home address.**
The increased numbers of new arrivals of unaccompanied children under the age of 16, needing to be placed with foster carers has impacted upon availability for local children to be placed with foster carers within 20 miles of their local community. However, this target started to improve as the new children's homes and supported accommodation for unaccompanied children opened during 2025. The target is also impacted upon by children placed in residential homes outside of the county, particularly for disabled children needing a specialist provision. The large numbers of other Local Authority children being placed into Kent based residential homes and Independent Fostering Agencies impacts upon the local market and Kents ability to place local children within their local community.
- **% of Care Leavers in employment, education or training (aged 18-21 years)**
The increase in unaccompanied asylum young adults transferring into the 18+ Care Leavers service without confirmed immigration status has impacted on our performance of young adults within education, training or employment (ETE). Without status, young unaccompanied adults are unable to legally work. During 2025, the availability of ESOL education courses reduced meaning performance in this area is impacted. The service have two specialist ETE workers who are focusing on improvement in this area alongside working closely with the Home Office to address the back log of asylum applications for care leavers. The performance has shown some improvement and is now within the amber rating and continues to be above the national average for ETE.



Virtual School Kent's Participation and Engagement Team

We continued to work to provide engaging and enriching opportunities for children and young people who are in receipt of services from Children's Social Care. Our team works to help empower these children and young people, to have their views and opinions heard and acted upon both within their individual care planning, and to help make positive changes to service design and delivery. We worked to ensure there is a wide range of participatory opportunities available to children and young people who come under the umbrella of corporate parenting.

Our team currently includes six apprentices, all of whom have lived experience of being in care, fostering or adoption. They are working towards level two and three qualifications and are supported to be successful by a small team of participation officers. In the last year, we promoted care experienced members of the team who originally joined the team as level two apprentices, these team members successfully completed qualifications and worked hard to attain permanent progression roles in the team.

About Our Councils

Our children and young people's council groups continue to have strong memberships with attendance from a wide range of children and young people who live throughout the county.

We continue to focus on making our council groups as accessible as possible, as we recognise not everyone is able or wanting to travel to attend our main meetings in person. We feel that to appeal to as wide a range of our children and young people as possible, it is important to offer different ways for children and young people to feel included and share their views, opinions and experiences.

All our councils now offer a range of opportunities for young people to engage if they cannot attend the main meetings and we embedded a 'we will come to you in a way that suits you' approach to our engagement work. In addition to running our main meetings, children and young people can meet with members of the team on an individual or small group basis, both in person and virtually. This approach was received positively by children, young people and by their parents and foster carers and we can evidence we have a wider network of young people who are now engaging with us.

Our Councils

- The Young Adult Council (YAC) is for care experienced young people aged 16-25-years-old.
- The Young Adult Council Extra (YACE) for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people aged 16-25-years-old.
- Our Children and Young People's Council (OCYPC) is for young people in care aged 11-16-years-old.
- Our Children and Young Peoples Council Extra (OCYPCE) is an outreach group for care experienced young people aged 7-16-years-old who are unable to make the main meetings.
- The Super Council is for Children in Care aged 7-11-years-old.
- The Adoptables is for adopted young people aged 11-18-years-old.
- The Young Persons Reference Group (YPRC) is for adopted young people aged 16+.
- Children Who Care (CWC) for the sons and daughters of foster carers aged 7+.
- Our Children and Young Peoples Council making a great and important change (OCYPC MAGIC) is for young people with special educational needs (SEND) and disabilities (adopted, in care or with a social worker) aged 11-18-years-old.

The Young Adult Council and Young Adult Council Extra

This year, our YAC continued to grow, welcoming new members. The group meets monthly in Maidstone and Ashford; engages in a wide range of discussions and activities designed to empower young people and amplify their voices. A variety of topics are discussed such as:



- Members sharing practical advice on saving money, including the use of loyalty schemes and cost-cutting strategies for entertainment, travel, takeaways and food shopping. Their insights were turned into social media posts to help others make informed decisions.
- Our group explored how to extend corporate parenting by increasing job opportunities, offering skill days, providing training for professionals and tackling stigmas.
- Members compared branded products with supermarket essentials, discovering which items offered the best value without compromising on quality. The activity helped them make smarter shopping decisions.
- Our group reviewed the participation strategy, celebrating its strengths while offering constructive feedback to improve accessibility and inclusivity.
- They contributed to a consultation with John Lewis, sharing ideas on how to better support care leavers entering employment. Their input was captured in a graphic and shared with the company to inform recruitment strategies.
- A short first-aid course was taken part in, learning essential skills such as treating burns, allergic reactions, cuts, CPR, the recovery position and responding to choking incidents.
- Mental health was also explored and the support available to young people, while identifying community events and access to leisure facilities as key drivers of positive wellbeing.

YACE saw increased engagement through regular coffee mornings. These informal drop-in sessions helped build stronger relationships between the team and unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people.

Throughout the year, both groups had the opportunity to take part in a range of social events including a Christmas party, escape room challenges, international cooking experience and a summer BBQ. These events help create opportunities for connections, celebration and fun.

Super Council, Our Children and Young Peoples Council and Our Children and Young Peoples Council Extra

It was another exciting year for the Super Council, OCYPC and OCYPCE, as they welcomed both established members and new faces to the groups. In previous years, we continued to involve young people who cannot attend the main meetings by running additional individual meetings. These are either virtual or in person to ensure as many young people as possible can share their views and opinions about being in care in Kent.

This year also marked the inaugural Regional Children in Care Council with other Children in Care Councils from across the Southeast. Groups from Medway, Bracknell, Windsor and Maidenhead, Reading and West Sussex joined our OCYPC in Maidstone to celebrate the power of young people sharing their voices. We were also joined by Become who worked with the young people on their *#GoneTooFarCampaign*, and the care leaders who led a session called *Power to Lead*, which looked at resilience, overcoming barriers and how to share messages positively and authentically. This year, the three groups discussed several topics including:

- **Young person's participation strategy:** Young people made suggestions about what this strategy should contain and how it should be presented.
- **Re-launching the Kent Pledge:** Members evaluated the current pledge cards and made suggestions about how to update and improve them. They also suggested ways to ensure more young people and workers are aware of the Kent pledge and a promise Kent County Council makes to its children and young people in care. These suggestions included more training for

workers and creating a film. The latter of which is currently been worked on, whilst Kent County Council's communications team are redesigning the pledge cards. This forms the basis of a new challenge issued by the Children in Care Councils.

- **Children and young people's feedback:** Our members met with Kent County Council's practice development and analytics teams to evaluate some new qualitative feedback questions which has been devised for children and young people to answer. Their advice was used to improve the guide that sits alongside the questions, with a particular focus on language and how to make children feel comfortable when speaking about their experiences.
- **A new survey for children in care:** Our young people discussed the possibility of a new annual survey to ascertain young people in care's feelings around the support they receive.
- **Direct work with children:** Council members produced a document detailing their advice for social workers undertaking direct work with children. They spoke about how staff could engage and support young people as well as how the environment can impact this work. Their views were brought together and added to Kent Procedures Online. It will also form part of social workers' inductions in North Kent.
- Some members of our council groups also joined us for a focus group to help Coram Voice write a letter to the then Children and Families Minister. They made suggestions for what she and her department should prioritise for children in care and care leavers, which included mental health support and improved preparation for adulthood.

Children Who Care

Our CWC council is a group for the children of Kent County Council's foster carers aged 7-15-years-old. We have a well-established group of regular members who actively share their views and help shape improvements to fostering services across the county.

- In October, members helped to develop the young person's participation strategy, making suggestions on the content and the importance of this document for children of foster carers. During this meeting, they also worked together to design thank you cards for the fostering review team. These cards are shared with other children whose families foster, as a gesture of appreciation.
- In previous sessions, members expressed they sometimes feel less supported than other members of their household. In response, the February meeting focused on creating a guide for fostering teams, outlining what children of foster carers need from their fostering social workers. The group worked thoughtfully on both the content and design of this guide.
- During foster care fortnight, members explored the theme: the power of relationships. They discussed qualities of being a good friend and how they can apply their ideas with the children who their parents look after. They also designed digital flyers including their ideas from the meeting, to be shared on social media to promote foster care fortnight.
- They fed back on the annual feedback forms for the children of foster carers. They suggested ideas on how these can be improved and highlighted barriers to increase uptake in the completion of these forms.



The Adoptables

Our adoptables group has a well-established cohort of young people, most of whom attended regularly and consistently throughout the year. We also welcomed some new members. Back in October, the young people made a short film about the group, why young people attend and the sort of agenda items discussed. The film was shown at the Adoption England Annual Conference in Leeds. The film was shown to professionals, young people and parents to promote our young people's group.

During their October meeting, members reviewed the young person's participation strategy. We looked at if the current content needed updating. The young people also reviewed what our

participation team's goals and priorities should be, along with feedback from our other children and young people's councils, this helped shaped our new, updated young person's participation strategy.

Our young people expressed their views on wanting to have some of the adoptable meetings to focus on independence and preparing for adulthood. Over the February, April and May meetings, we concentrated on aspects of independence and well-being that may help them in the future.

Several young people spoke about their experiences of bullying in school. We invited KOOTH, a young people's mental health support charity, to talk to our adoptables members. KOOTH spoke about relationships with peers and provided signposting to other advice and support.

The independence programme continued in May when our young people got together to make a three-course meal. Our young people made the meal from scratch, with supervision, and then all ate together. The day gave the chance for young people to show off their cooking skills, social skills and a chance to taste all their hard work.

Our Children and Young People's Council MAGIC

OCYPC MAGIC is our newest council group and is successfully running for two years now. It is open to young people aged 11–18-years-old, who are in care, adopted, have a social worker or those living with special educational needs and disabilities. This year, the young people were involved in helping shape the new revised version of the young people's participation strategy. They were particularly keen to share their views on this topic.

They had the opportunity to share their views on what a safe space looks like and what makes a good worker. Their valuable feedback helped the commissioning of the new therapeutic support service and their feedback was gratefully received, being included in the specification for the new service.

They also focussed on becoming independent and developing life skills. We asked our young people what challenges they face as they grow and mature. They shared what they would like to become more independent. We listened to their views very carefully and tailored our future meetings to meet their needs.

Our young people participated in a cooking workshop, being given support to choose the appropriate food for a recipe and practise following instructions, creating a delicious three course meal. They undertook a driving lesson at Young Drivers to help them follow road signs, directions and become confident enough to move on to their own future driving lessons, and we all travelled to London by train to visit the London aquarium. We spoke about how to travel safely and money management.



Council Memberships for our
children and young people  **THE ADOPTABLES**

Super
council

16

OCYPC

37

YAC

26

YACE

30

Adoptables and
reference
group

14

CWC

15

OCYPC MAGIC

18

Total = 156

Activity Days

10

Activity days for our children and young people remain our main way to introduce ourselves and get to know them. By engaging with them in fun and interactive sessions, we also get lots of informal opportunities to speak with them allowing them to be open about their own experiences, both positive and negative. Many of our council members are recruited through meeting them at activity days.

Days remain varied and are led by suggestions from children and young people. The last year included visits to Dover, Hever and Leeds Castles, the Marlowe Theatre pantomime, escape rooms and to the Big Cat Sanctuary. Plus a range of outdoor pursuits, art activities, wildlife parks and horse riding. We look to provide opportunities to children and young people to try things they have never had the opportunity to do before.

Engagement Work

Children in care councils' countywide event: At the end of 2024, all three of the children in care councils come together for a countywide meeting. Several of their corporate parents attended, including Kevin Kasaven, Caroline Smith, and Stephen Gray on behalf of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Agenda items included devising the content of the young person's participation strategy, the group discussed what is important to them and what support they would like from their corporate parents to have or achieve these things. Young people identified lots of different things important to them with several themes standing out. These included:

- Seeing family.
- Opportunities to express themselves and be heard.
- Good foster carers.
- Social workers who stay.
- Their education.
- Understanding their own lives and what is happening in them.
- Having technology, including phones.
- Their pets.

They then thought about how their corporate parents could support them, whether this was their own social workers or more senior staff like directors. They told us corporate parents should:

- Arrange family time promptly.
- Help with their education and believe in them.
- Listen to them and allow them to express their views.
- Trust them and include them in decisions that are made about their lives, allowing them to explore options and supporting their choices.
- Social workers should stay longer and explain why they are leaving if they do go.
- Support them to get the things they think they need to have happy, healthy and positive lives.
- Treat them like you would treat your own child.
- Celebrate them more so they feel people believe in them.
- Support them to be able to have private conversations with their social workers.

Young people attending the Corporate Parenting Panel: In February 2025, our team were pleased to support five young people to attend the Corporate Parenting Panel. These young people shared their views about being in care in Kent with panel members and what they felt the panel should prioritise and focus on to ensure care is a positive experience for children. The wide range of suggestions for their corporate parents included:

- Additional support for children coming into and leaving care.

- More support around identity and culture.
- Improved mental health support.

All five of the young people committed their time to preparing for the panel and spoke eloquently and articulately with panel members, generously sharing their lived experience. We were incredibly proud of them.

Young reviewers: Our team are working with practice development officers for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people. They are creating a young reviewers programme, to support the quality assurance framework and inspection readiness for the local authority's children's homes and supported accommodation. This will include children's homes and supported accommodation utilised to accommodate unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people, Kent Supported Homes and overnight short breaks homes.

We are working with our care experienced team members to co-design how young reviewers, often called young inspectors, can support quality assurance practice inquiry. This involves reviewing and evaluating the quality of support provided by Kent County Council supported accommodation and children's home providers, to understand the experiences of the children living within each setting and ensuring compliance with statutory regulations. Young reviewers will form part of a review team which includes colleagues from the safeguarding, professional standards and quality assurance unit. Research shows young reviewers bring value to a local authority and individual services:

- Ensures services are listening to children and young people when they make decisions that affect their lives, contributing to their rights under the united nations convention on the rights of the child.
- Services better meet the needs of children and young people.
- Ofsted inspectors value meaningful young reviewers.
- Improved communication with services.
- Young reviewers' activity is a source of valuable evidence.
- Young reviewers have new opportunities to develop widely applicable skills.

We are initially developing this work by training and supporting our apprentices to carry out this work. In the long term, we aim to broaden the scope of young reviewers to include other care experienced young people.

Listen up training sessions: Following the successful launch of Listen Up! by members of our children in care councils at Corporate Parenting Panel's takeover day in July 2024, the training session was rolled out throughout the Children, Young People and Education directorate. This was delivered by our apprentice team on behalf of the young people, it continues to reinforce the difference active listening and positive participation in decision making can make to children and young people.

It was delivered to services, such as Virtual School Kent, safeguarding, professional standards and quality assurance, Maidstone children and family's team and the front door service, whilst a shortened version formed part of the practice framework roadshows.

Feedback from staff, foster carers and parents

"My little one had a great time in and outside. He tried to engage with the other children who were all very accommodating. The staff were all friendly and chatty and helpful." "We had a lovely time and will definitely be booking on to more in the future. Thank you to everyone that made it possible." "The amazing Participation Team and the sense of safety that our daughter has every time she has contact with them. It's really precious. Also the opportunity to meet with friends from the adoption community and to see our APSE mentor again! Thank you so much Amy and the whole team. You are truly remarkable and precious."

"Can I say another big thank you to all the staff that work so hard at the Christmas party again. All our children love going and you do so much and really think of their individual needs."

"Thank you all so much for being brave and sharing your personal experiences - it is very difficult. The sharing of our own stories however to help others is so very important and impactful. We can change the lives of others through our difficult experiences, so again, thank you. I genuinely want to say that this is the best presentation and learning I have attended."

Corporate Parenting Events organised by our participation and engagement team

Summer Picnic

In June, our participation team, in collaboration with Adoption Partnership Southeast, facilitated the much-loved annual summer picnic at the Malling School in East Malling. This event is designed for adopted children and their families to come together in a relaxed, fun-filled environment to connect with each other and with professionals from Adoption Partnership Southeast and our participation team and have fun.

This year's theme was *Once Upon a Picnic*, bringing a magical fairy tale twist to the day. Families enjoyed a wide range of themed activities, including fairy garden making, magic wand crafting, tie-dye creations, plus other arts and crafts. The families were also entertained by a magician throughout the day. Sensory play stations and a quiet indoor area were also available. We were thrilled to welcome 49 families from across the region with 164 attendees. It was a truly magical day, filled with laughter, creativity and community spirit.

Christmas Parties

We facilitated two Christmas parties this year, one for adopted children and their families and one for children in care and their foster families. At both parties, there were opportunities for children to take part in festive arts and crafts, play a range of festive games, and take part in some sensory activities, as well as meet Santa Claus himself in his grotto and receive a small gift. The parties were a great opportunity for parents, carers and young people to connect, share stories and create memories.

Awards Celebrations

In July, Virtual School Kent held their annual awards celebration to commend, recognise and celebrate the achievements of our young people in care who are 16 years old and above.

This year, we received a record number of nominations with over 350 young people being recognised for their achievements and 13 top award winners chosen by our judging panel. YAC members were also celebrated for their continued hard work and contributions.

Young people attended the awards celebration at Marleybrook House near Canterbury, accompanied by their foster carers, personal advisers or social workers. Everyone had a chance to receive their award, as well as enjoying a vintage funfair and food.

Later in the year in September, it was time for our second annual awards celebration at the PGL Grosvenor Hall Centre. This celebration recognises the great achievements and efforts of our children in care aged up to 16.

386 children who had been nominated for an award were invited to our celebration, along with their foster carer, support worker or social worker. 65 members of our children in care councils and members from our council for the children of foster carers were also celebrated and received an award to thank them for their contribution to our councils.

Both award events were supported by Richard Palmer, Chairman of Kent County Council, and members of the Corporate Parenting Panel including Christine Palmer and Pamela Williams.

Photography

Activity days



Council meetings



18+ Care Leavers Service

As of November 2025, we support 1,868 care experienced young people aged 18 up to 25 years old, along with 171 care experienced adults currently being supported by Adult Services. An additional 1,106 adults who are aged 21 up to 24 years old, have opted out from the extended personal advisor support after their 21st birthday. This cohort of young people are entitled to opt-in or out for the extended personal advisor support up until their 25th birthday. We have a legal obligation to keep in touch at least once a year, but they can opt back in to access support at any time through our duty service.

Over the summer the service participated with a Children's Outcome Analysis (COA). This is a deep dive practice enquiry into the service. The subsequent report outlined several areas of strength and some areas for development, resulting in both heads of service and service managers pulling together an Action Plan for service improvement. This includes developing a bespoke Local Offer to care experienced young parents, to consider how we better support them.

The Voice of Our Young People

During last year's annual care leavers week, we launched our 2024 care leavers survey, with the result from that being published in January 2025. The survey saw another increase in the number of care leavers responding and participating in the survey. With a total sample size of 852 young people returning their surveys, there was a majority of 67% rating their experience of the service with either four or five stars. For 2025, the month of November is dedicated nationally to "Care Leavers Month". There will be a range of participation and activity events to celebrate.

Kent Supported Homes

Kent Supported Homes is our in-house Ofsted registered Supported Accommodation in a family environment. Hosts provide a home for young people aged 16-21 years, with support in their transition to independence and adulthood. The Quality Assurance Team supported the service with a Practice Enquiry over the summer as part of its preparation for its Ofsted inspection visit. The service developed an Action Plan in collaboration with the professional standards and quality assurance team. The delivery of which will ensure the service is Ofsted compliant in terms of the Supported Accommodation Regulations (2023).

Developments and Initiatives

In July 2025, the service held a Summer Activity Day in collaboration with the University of Kent. The day was packed with a wide range of activities and sports and was supported by partner agencies and stakeholders which included the Young Lives Foundation, Kent Police, Kent Cricket, The Rees Foundation, the Local Family Hubs and many others.

Care Leavers Joint Housing Protocol: In July 2025, the service held a housing conference with colleagues from the 12 Local District Councils which focused on staff training and homelessness prevention. It launched the new Joint Protocol for care leavers agreed between Kent County Council and all 12 district councils.

Christmas dinner: Following on the previous years of a successful Christmas dinner for our young people in both South and East Kent, the project expanded to North and West Kent. This is to ensure no care experienced young adult is left alone on Christmas Day.

Safeguarding training: As a part of the learning programme, a service wide training on adult safeguarding was delivered with the support of the practice development team.

Multi-agency working: Training was delivered to staff, in collaboration with the Front Door Service, to ensure a holistic and robust multi-agency support gets provided by the professional involved, such as Social Workers and Personal Advisors, to parents who have a child in need of protection.

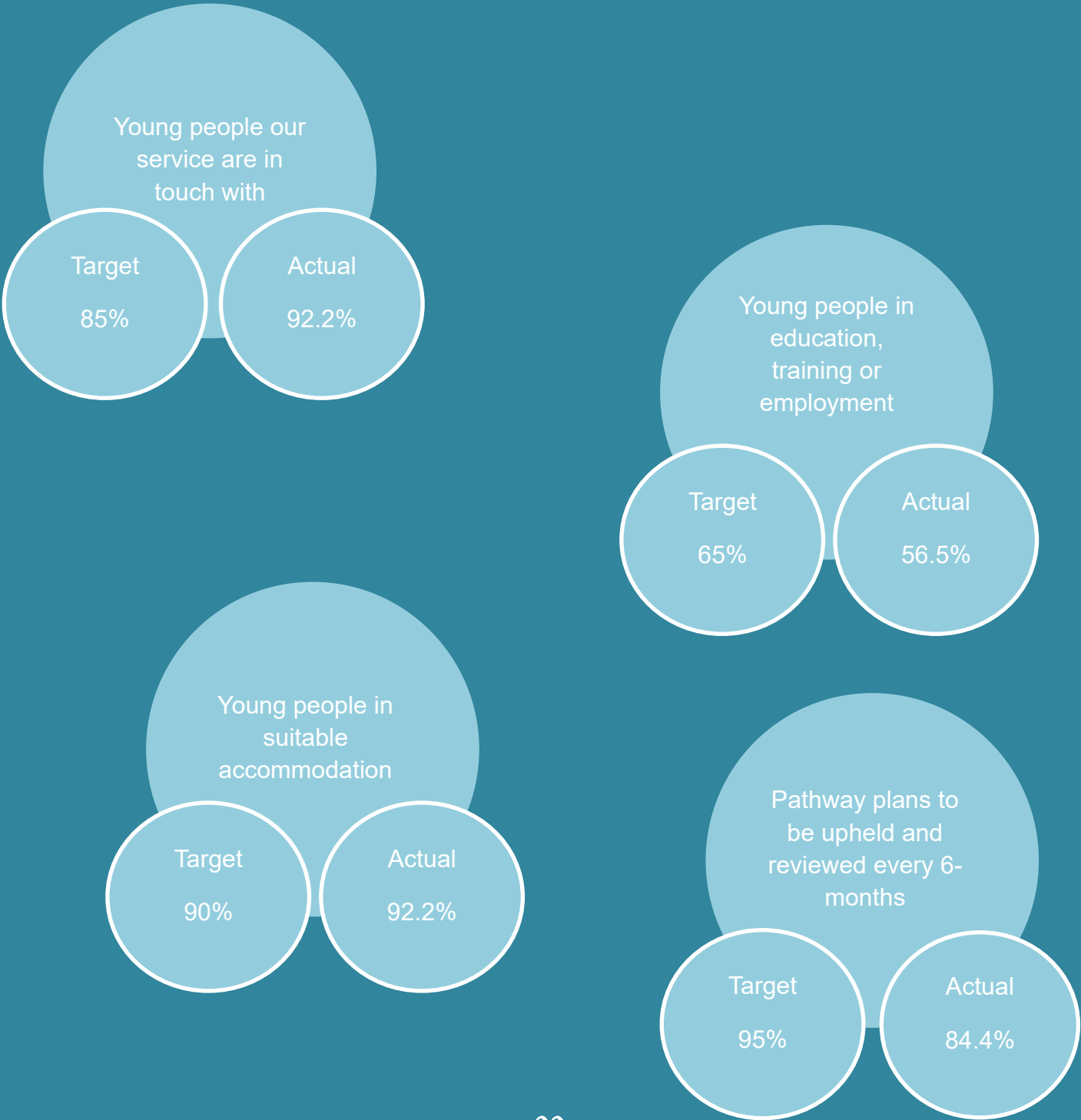
Apprenticeships: Our Care Leaver apprentice completed his qualification, receiving a merit. We wish him well in his future endeavours and now recruited two new apprentices for the service.

Food banks: Our food bank project was recognised at the National Leaving Care Bench Marking Forum annual awards and won the category Team of the Year 2024.

Local Offer to care experienced parents: We are in the process of developing a bespoke local offer for care experienced young people who are parents, to think about how, as a local authority, we can support them.

Performance for those young people our service is in touch with

As of September 2025, according to the last corporate parenting score card published on 15th October 2025



Kent Fostering Service

The service has two Heads of Fostering, with one having an overall responsibility for the Kinship Service and the other leads on fostering for children in all other foster homes. Both are Agency Decision Makers for our fostering panels, alongside the Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting.

As of 22nd September 2025, 650 children were looked after in 510 mainstream fostering households and a further 106 children were cared for in 81 kinship fostering households.

Performance for 2025

Kent Fostering and Kinship Service achieved:

- A range of fostering families able to care for a diverse range of children including those with disabilities, parent/s and child(ren), children requiring care in an emergency, sibling groups and long term placed unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- 40 fostering beds for newly arrived unaccompanied asylum-seeking children requiring emergency care prior to their transfer under the national transfer scheme. Whereas this did have some impact on our ability to place non-unaccompanied asylum-seeking children requiring a foster family within 20 miles of their local community, the opening of Kent's children's homes for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and the regular review of capacity and demand for foster carers for this cohort of children, allowed for a reduction in the number of retained beds and allowed more of our foster carers to be considered for children whose families live in Kent.
- Step Across to fostering achieved for seven children and young people who were ready to move from residential care back into a family home, achieving a budget saving of **£1,505,680.47**.
- Support for young people to remain with their foster family under a Staying Put arrangement.
- A permanent and stable workforce of skilled and experienced team managers, fostering social workers and social work assistants able to provide reflective and thought-provoking supervision and specialist support with behaviour management and trauma informed reparenting.
- Direct intervention and support to children in care where their named social worker was unavailable or the children's teams were experiencing staffing capacity challenges, for example: moving children between foster families, exploring concerns or complaints raised by children, direct and individual work with children in care.
- Access to therapeutic fostering support through a specialist team including therapists to support provision of trauma informed care and promote placement stability.
- The skills to foster preparatory training, including interviews with potential applicants by our Virtual School Kent apprentices.
- A variety of support groups including those for carers looking after unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and children under five years old, with complex needs, disabilities, and adolescents. This included evening support groups to encourage the second and linked foster carers who often work full time outside of their fostering role to attend.
- Equality, diversity and inclusion groups to encourage conversation to promote a fair and inclusive fostering service where all carers and children feel a valued part of our community.
- Fostering service mornings, one of which focussed on the needs of disabled children and how those needs can be met through quality foster care.
- Training, support and development standard workshops to support new carers in their first year of fostering to complete this regulatory requirement and annual review workshops to support all foster carers to understand and complete their evidence of continued capacity and capability to foster.
- Fostering family events which included easter eggs hunts, summer and Christmas parties and pantomimes to help develop the fostering community, create a sense of belonging and build networks around carers and children.
- Wellbeing walks to promote positive mental health for foster carers and increase their resilience in caring for children who have experienced trauma.
- The race equalities matters tea break trailblazer logo continues to feature on our website following the award going to our service in 2024. This continues to support our reputation as an

inclusive fostering service where people can have confidence we listen and respond to the voice and feelings of carers about race equality and continually take steps to tackle this.

We represented at eleven community events throughout 2024 and 2025, including the Kent Police staff and family open days and pride, which generated 25% of all enquiries. Although most of this number already signed up for a virtual information event via advertising on our website and social media.

New roller banners with up to date and diverse imagery continued to be used at these events and towards the end of the reporting year new merchandise including Foster for Kent bunting, t-shirts, pens and trolley tokens were produced, to help increase our visibility and create mementos for people to take away and think “*Kent fostering first*” if considering becoming a foster carer.



We advertised and promoted specific campaigns to care for disabled children and children needing to move from residential care to a family environment in community magazines such as Kelsi, for education professionals, a special educational needs magazine and parish magazines.

A total of 664 schools were e-mailed requesting information about our service was included in their parent mail. Although schools did not always confirm whether they had done so, 13 enquiries were made from people who referenced the school flyer as their reason for making contact, with three of those enquiries resulting in an application.

Our **Refer a Friend** scheme continues to operate, enabling current foster carers to receive a financial incentive if they recommended applicants to our service and went on to be fully approved. In 2024-2025, a record number of 33 refer a friend forms were received, with fourteen of these, 42%, during July, August, and September when payments for successful referrals increased from £500 to £1,000. Of the thirty-three recommendations, twenty-four were sent applications and twenty-one of these were returned, giving a conversion rate of 88%.

Achieving a culturally matched foster home for children remains a priority, as the number of children in care from black backgrounds increased in 2024 to 2025 by nearly 2%, now at 7.8% of the child in care population. However, carer representation from black and mixed backgrounds remains low at 6% of our foster carer community.



We will continue to land key campaigns throughout the year focused on this demographic, such as black history month, and will continue to adopt an always on approach when landing content. This includes co-creating campaigns with our Black, Asian and global majority foster carers ensuring their voices and lived experiences shape storytelling content across the year.

We will connect with local churches and community centres in Dartford, Gravesham and other diverse areas where there is a significant representation of communities from the global majority. Inclusive messaging will continue to be embedded throughout the year, beyond heritage campaigns, and reflected across all touchpoints, including information events, digital ads and printed materials. Focus will be on targeting and building strategic partnerships with cultural organisations, community influencers and ethnic faith leaders to extend our visibility and trust within diverse communities.

Recruiting and Marketing

Our recruitment strategy continued to prioritise the use of digital platforms to advertise our service because this remained the most effective way in which to increase our visibility. Facebook generated 28k followers, LinkedIn 40k, Twitter 86k and Instagram 8.5k. Despite an increase in our social media reach and specifically Facebook to 665.4k people and a total of 27.5k link clicks on content, enquiries to become a foster carer via social media accounted for 4% of all enquiries.

Whereas this was an increase of 2% on the previous year, this informed a decision to increase the number of in person events that were attended, to try to engage at a more local level with those communities who might have people who wish to foster.

By the end of the reporting year, 794 people subscribed to receive communications from us using the new e-shot platform, which was an increase of seventy-nine from last year's usual e-mail marketing streams. The platform allowed us to target our messaging and communications with enquirers to our service and opted in to hear from us, and could unsubscribe, but who were not necessarily ready to make an application, maintaining their engagement and reducing the likelihood of them making an enquiry or application to foster with an independent fostering agency.

TV, radio and film: We continued our partnership with the council advertising network to collaborate and commission a film about Fostering called *Everything* which was then featured on our website and Facebook page.

Information events: Following analysis of previous years information event feedback forms from attendees, this year saw the introduction of a new presentation format with enhanced content through the addition of videos highlighting the foster carer award ceremony and the council advertising network fostering film *Everything*. In collaboration with the Virtual School Kent's participation team, the voice of children in care through letters and pictures about their experiences of fostering and what makes a good foster carer, were added to the presentation. Questions and answers for foster carers and staff continued to be an integral part of the events.

This was the fifth year of holding information events virtually, with approximately one event per month, the majority of which took place in the evening and some at a weekend. Across the year, 308 people signed up to an event and 144 attended, resulting in a conversion rate of 47% and only 1% lower than last year. Of those who signed up, 105 were sent applications and 68 of these were returned with a conversion rate of 65% and of those who attended, 69 were sent applications and 53 were returned with a conversion rate of 77%. The conversion being applications sent vs applications returned, the average overall for this period being 43%. We continued to see a higher number of applications returned where enquiries had attended an information event.

Enquiries: We saw a 4% increase in people contacting us to express their interest in becoming a foster carer compared to the previous year, from 736 enquiries to 764 despite the national downward trend, and therefore involvement in Local Authority Fostering Southeast does appear to have boosted enquiry numbers. However, a reduction of 4% (315) in the number of initial enquiry forms completed, a decrease of 4% (305) in the number of application packs sent and a decrease of 10% (135) for applications received in comparison to last year, indicates the quality of enquiry was poorer than in previous reporting years.

Learning and Development

We successfully held our annual foster carer conference, aligning with our 2024-2025 objective to provide new insights into working with and caring for children inclusively and encourage discussion about the impact of prejudice and discrimination.

The conference, titled *Fostering Inclusivity*, was led by Meera Spillett, a former Director of Children's Services, with 40 years of experience in the social care and health sectors, and had been in the care of Kent County Council herself as a child. A total of 164 foster carers and staff attended the conference where they engaged in sessions on intersectionality, labels, systemic racism, cultural competence and responding to discrimination. The feedback on the conference was positive, particularly regarding the course content, delivery and learning outcomes.

In line with our other learning and development objectives, we delivered a comprehensive foster carer training program, also available to our staff, and encouraged good and consistent practice. This continued to be informed by regular consultation with carers and staff through the county advisory board and ambassador group, as well as feedback from foster carer annual reviews and as a result new training courses for the reporting year were introduced as follows:

- Gaming and gambling awareness workshop.
- Mental Capacity Act and Deprivation of Liberty (DOLs).
- Speech and language.
- Helping children understand how their body and brain respond to stress.
- ADHD and associated cognitive theories.
- Autistic masking and trauma response.
- Autism and anxiety.
- Meltdowns and shutdowns.
- Sensory processing disorder.
- Autism awareness difference not deficit.
- UEA moving to adoption model.
- Teens and social media webinar.
- Siblings in care.
- Transitions and healthy endings.



Another objective was for us to continue to ensure our training program included mandatory learning for all linked carers. This was achieved through providing all linked carers with the opportunity to attend safer care training, understanding trauma and safeguarding against radicalisation the prevent duty.

We endeavoured to facilitate maximum uptake by holding evening courses as well as daytime, as many linked carers work full time outside of their fostering role. During the reporting period, Safe care training evening sessions were conducted four times, with attendance ranging from 79% of those who had booked to attend (95% of the available spaces booked) in April to 93% in September (75% of the available spaces booked). Other evening training sessions introduced were:

- Autism awareness training - difference not deficit.
- Sensory processing disorder training.
- Meltdown and shutdowns.
- Autism and anxiety training.
- Autistic masking - a trauma response.
- ADHD and associated cognitive theories.
- Helping children understand how their body and brains respond to stress.

In December 2024, a new e-learning provider was commissioned, moving from a pay per licence program to a subscription program, which not only brought cost savings, but access to a wider range of training courses and a more user-friendly platform for carers to complete their learning. This was introduced in partnership with foster carers and staff who tested the new platform and some of the courses with excellent feedback being given. The platform also allowed the introduction of different e-learning for Kent Supported Homes hosts and the requirement to complete this is their period of assessment; namely:

- Adult safeguarding.
- Child sexual exploitation.
- Extremism radicalisation and terrorism.
- Safeguarding and safer care.

The year two core training for Kent Supported Homes hosts also changed in the reporting year. Based on feedback from hosts and accommodation officers to include *The Incredible Adolescent*

Brain, which replaced *Contextual Safeguarding*, this was moved to be part of the safeguarding and safe care e-learning module pre-approval.

Local Authority Fostering Southeast

On the 1st of July 2024, the Local Authority Fostering Southeast virtual recruitment hub was launched and saw us partner with nineteen other local authorities in the Southeast and led by Bracknell Forest Council to deliver a centralised platform for fostering enquiries.



In this reporting year the hub received a total of 2,915 enquiries, 550 of which were for Kent (19%) and 823 of those enquiries were accepted (application sent), 215 of which were for Kent (26%). Since the middle of November 2024, potential carers were offered the opportunity to speak to a Local Authority Fostering Southeast ambassador, who are Kent foster carers interviewed, appointed and paid for their time through the hub. In just four months, fifty-four households took up the offer, with twenty-five going on to return an application and giving a conversion rate of 46%.



Kent Association of Foster Carers

We continue to work closely with Kent Association of Foster Carers and its significance in attracting and retaining people to foster for Kent. The social committees in each foster support team area were well established with a clear hierarchy and accountability to fundraise for various local and countywide events for fostering families. The committees started to give thought to accessibility to the events for our disabled children and their foster carers. Two large 'summerfest' events were also held at Dreamland in Margate and Kent Life Maidstone, for which the charity reported overwhelming positive feedback.

Mockingbird Programme

As part of the Department of Education's commitment to the recruitment and retention of foster carers and the services involvement with Local Authority Fostering Southeast, £160k was allocated to Kent to develop the Fostering Network's mockingbird programme in 2024-2025.

This program is an evidence-based model structured around the support and relationships an extended family provides, nurturing the relationships between children, young people and foster families and supporting them to build a resilient and caring community. Led by a hub home carer and liaison worker, the constellation community offers vital peer support and guidance alongside social activities, planned and emergency sleepovers and learning and development opportunities to strengthen relationships and permanence.

In September 2024, the service seconded an experienced fostering Social Work Assistant into the role of the Mockingbird Liaison worker, who throughout November 2024 to March 2026 will develop and

support three constellations in the South, East and West Kent fostering areas, where a total of 46 children living in 24 fostering households were supported. Early feedback from foster carers is the scheme making a significant difference to the children's overall stability within the foster home. Foster carers report feeling more supported, a greater sense of a fostering community and being able to call on a few other carers, alongside the main hub carer, at times of difficulty. The analytics team are supporting the service undertake an impact evaluation of the Mockingbird scheme, including surveys to foster carers and children participating in the programme. Results from the evaluation will be published in December 2025.

Foster Carers 2025 Award Ceremony

Our annual awards took place on 14th November 2025 and included awards for Foster Carers, Kent Supported Homes hosts, Kinship carers and social care staff. A record 332 nominations were received across a wide range of categories with each winner receiving a certificate and hamper.

The event was attended by:

- The Leader of Kent County Council Linden Kemkaran
- Chairman of Kent County Council Richard Palmer
- Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services Christine Palmer
- Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel Pamela Williams
- Interim Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education Christinne McInnes



Kent Fostering Award winners 2025

Kinship Service

Extensive work on the development of our new service began in the spring of 2023, following the Government's agenda outlined in their document *Stable Homes Built on Love*. As a Local Authority, the aim was for our service to support a reduction in the number of children becoming looked after, thus reducing the need for expensive care provisions and ensuring an ethos of children being cared for within their local network first, without the need for a home with a mainstream foster carer.

Our Teams

We have three assessment teams consisting of three team managers and 18 social workers. These teams cover the whole of Kent as well as undertaking any assessments which are out of county. To provide support to our Kinship carers, we have a support team which is made up of one team manager, one senior practitioner and three fostering social workers. For family support for special guardians, we have the Special Guardianship and Therapeutic Support Team which includes a team of six social worker assistants to support special guardians as well as a team of four therapists who can offer therapeutic support to all carers as well as those on a Special Guardianship Order.

Our assessment teams' main function is the completion of viability assessments and full assessments for:

- Kinship foster carers, Connected Persons Regulations 24 and 25.
- Special Guardianship Orders.
- Child Arrangement Orders.

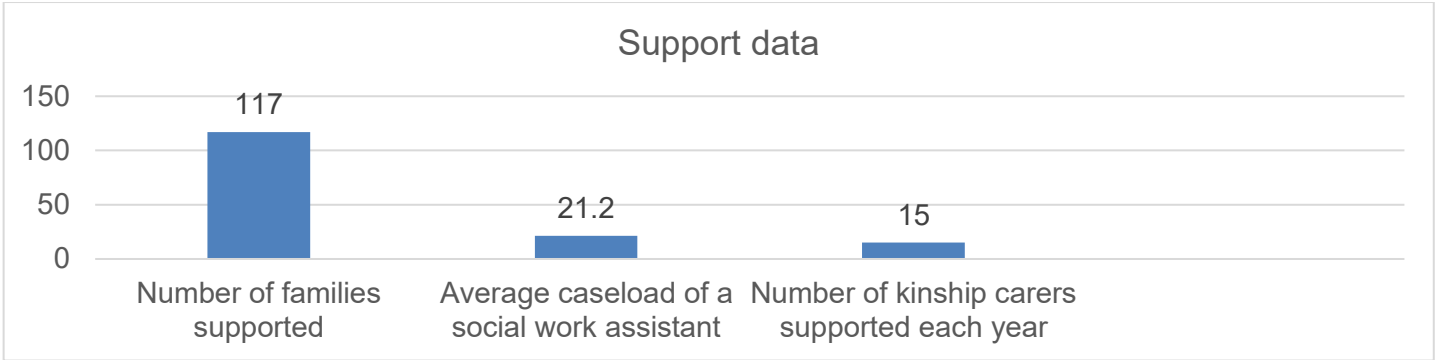
The support team provides supervision and support to kinship foster carers in line with the Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards. The role of the special guardian and therapeutic support team includes:

- Taking direct referrals from the Front Door Service, special guardians and professionals relating to children who are on a Special Guardianship Order.
- Offer support identified within existing Special Guardianship Order support plans.
- Taking kinship cases from early help teams where there is an active involvement of support to special guardians.
- Working with families who have an open referral to the adoption and special guardianship support fund.
- Working with the childrens allowance review team in supporting families with Special Guardianship Order allowances.
- Budget responsibility of this has moved to the Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting with line management of childrens allowance review team moving to business support staff.
- The kinship support team manager making and overseeing applications to the adoption and special guardianship support fund.
- Special guardian support and therapeutic fostering team.

To offer support to families, a current Special Guardianship Order must be in place with the children the order relates to, still in residence. Support is given to families where the Special Guardianship Order was granted in Kent or was granted in another local authority but over three years ago and the family continue to live in Kent. The family must also feel they would benefit from any support offered and support is given with consent only. The support offered includes:

- A Social Work Assistant assessment of need.
- Support in negotiating educational needs including advice and guidance from Virtual School Kent.
- Training in relation to trauma and attachment.
- Training in relation to caring for teenagers.
- Access to a therapy service via the adoption and special guardianship support fund if the child was previously in care.
- Peer group support and coffee mornings.

The number of families being supported at any one time within the team increased from 55 at the beginning of April 2024 to 117 as of the 31st of March 2025, with over 190 families being supported overall. They have given additional support to kinship foster carers where possible to help stabilise family relationships and support carers to meet the National Minimum Standards.



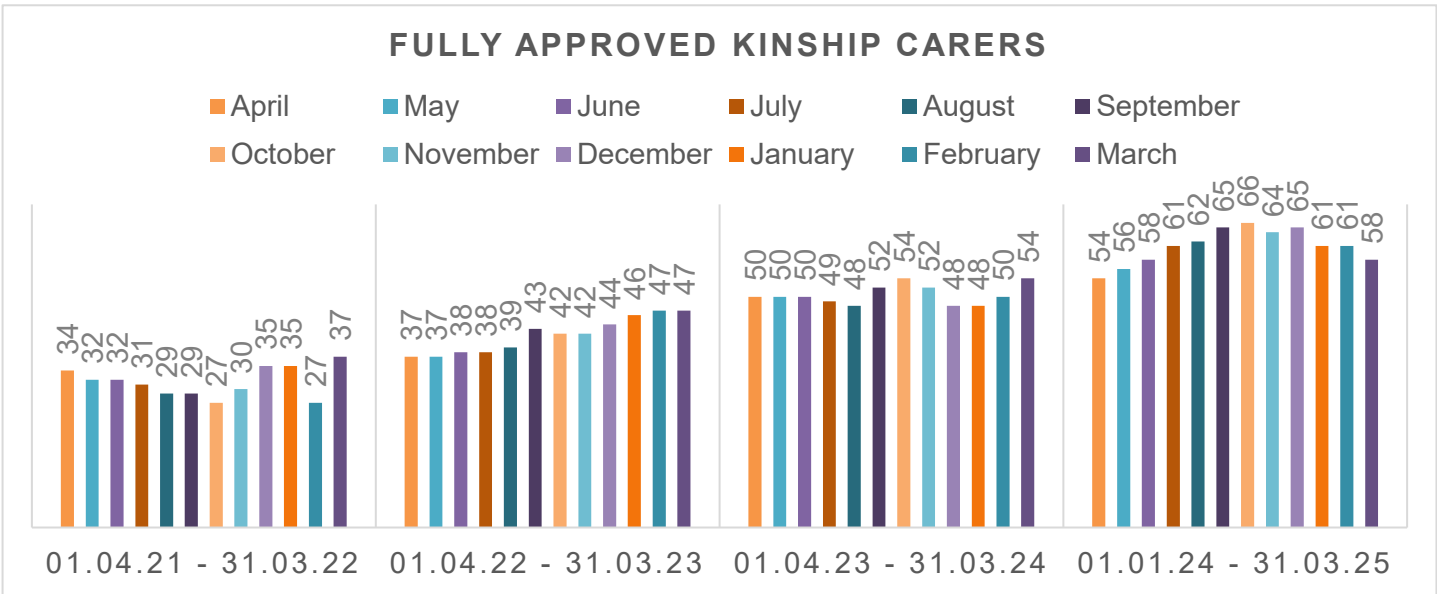
Our team are receiving referrals from professionals at a much earlier stage than crisis point which was the previous criteria. This is now affording the therapists the opportunity to offer a preventative service to foster carers and professionals rather than focussing on crisis intervention and becoming involved earlier, to achieve placement stability.

Kinship Foster Carers

There are currently 81 fully approved and temporarily approved kinship carer fostering households. The team facilitates face to face and virtual support groups for kinship carers, as well as a virtual support group for those who are still in the assessment process.

We observed a steady increase in the numbers of kinship foster carers over the past five years. This slow increase contrasts with the number of approvals overall per year which is significant. However, this is explained largely by the number of orders granted throughout the year and children returning home. Currently the percentage of temporarily approved and fully approved kinship foster carers to all foster carers in Kent fostering is 13.6%.

We introduced a new welcome information leaflet for new kinship carers which replaced the previous welcome letter sent following panel and it has lots of basic information and links such as how to claim mileage, out of hours information and contact details for the team. They collated information in collaboration with kinship carers about where you can access free legal advice and feedback from carers regarding what they have found helpful in their fostering journey which can now be shared with others.



There is close working with the Special Guardianship Order support team who joined several support groups to talk about the help and advice available in them to support carers who may be considering taking out an order on the children they are caring for.

In addition, there were several guest speakers at support groups including Foster Talk and Virtual School Kent. There is now a termly Kinship Fostering Newsletter which goes out to carers showing dates for future support groups and training, as well as information about events and resources. These go out two weeks prior to each school holiday to encourage carers to utilise the activities on offer through the holidays from both the Kent Association for Foster Carers, VSK and the area mainstream fostering support teams.

They continue to offer face to face support groups for South and West Kent in Ashford and North Kent near to Bluewater, and virtual groups in the daytime and evenings for all kinship carers. An additional face to face support group for East Kent in Thanet is being promoted to build local attendance. The **Kinship Local Offer** was published in October 2025.

Special Guardian Support and Virtual School Kent Promotion

For kinship carer week the team held two joint webinars which highlighted the support both the Special Guardianship Order support and the therapeutic teams can offer, how to access this support and the importance of support to kinship carers.

Leaflets were designed for all parts of our service including information about the assessment process for kinship foster carer applicants, the support offered by the special guardianship support team and what families attending family group conferences can expect from these meetings.

Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund

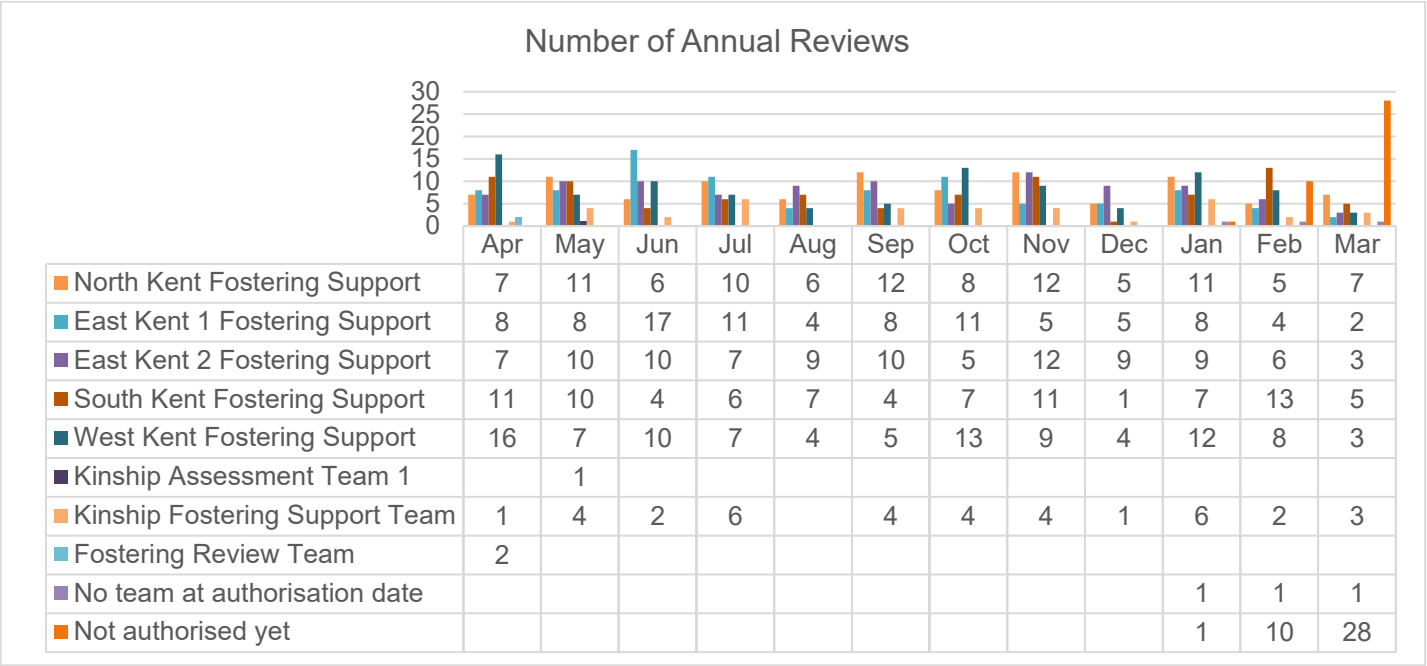
We apply to the adoption and special guardianship support fund directly when therapeutic services are identified to be beneficial to a special guardianship family. This is overseen by the team manager. When an application is successful, the adoption and special guardianship support fund agree funding to Kent County Council which the team uses to commission and pay agreed providers of therapeutic services. This ensures the right support for families at the right time. The total amount of funding successfully agreed for the year 2024-2025 totalled £107,102.36. This is a 564% increase from the previous year which totalled approximately £19,000.

Annual Review Statistics

The annual review of foster carers is managed and conducted by the Fostering Review Team who provide an independent assessment of foster carers' suitability to continue to foster, a quality assurance function and opportunities for reflection, learning and development for foster carers and wider service. Alongside Annual Reviews, the team complete six-month follow-up calls for newly approved carers including Kinship foster carers, with 52 completed over the last year.

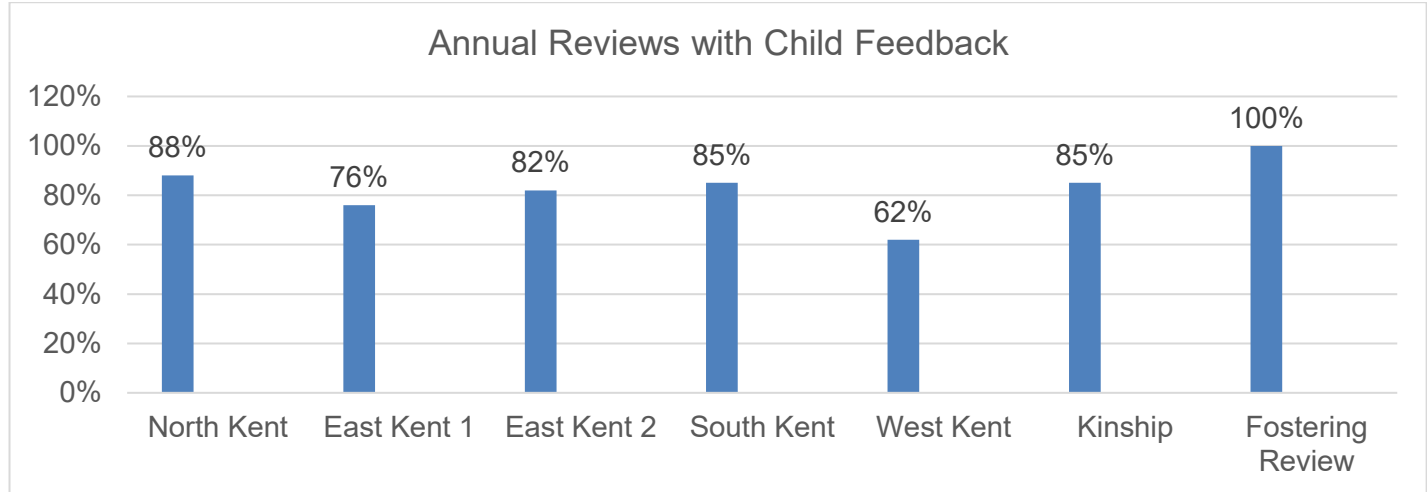
These calls provide us with valuable feedback on the assessment process, foster carer progress and development, as well as highlighting any areas for improvement. They were also involved in other work to support the wider service including viability assessments, supervising kinship carers during the re-alignment and completing allegations and standards of care investigations.

There were 554 reviews which took place over the last year, and these are detailed below.



Feedback

Children in care: The fostering social worker is now responsible for gathering the feedback from the children in care for foster carer reviews. Significant efforts were put into this important area and the feedback = increased to 79% from 47% in 2024.



Children’s social worker feedback: Children in care social workers are responsible for providing feedback on the care of their children for foster carers reviews. This feedback is vital in triangulating evidence. A total of 495 social workers completed the feedback form, which is 64% of all children’s social workers.

Feedback from foster carers: Foster carers reported feeling well supported and listened to by our service and feedback regarding support from fostering social workers is overwhelmingly positive. It is also positive for education and health workers. The involvement of the therapeutic fostering team, previously known as Sense of Belonging, continues to be highly regarded by foster carers when this was in place. Feedback from foster carers about payments is an area of significant dissatisfaction, following a new payments system going live in August 2025. Significant work is being undertaken to resolve initial early problems with the new system, whilst staff learnt new processes. Collaboration between the service and finance colleagues meant problems being resolved more quickly and seen an improvement in this area.

Adoption Partnership Southeast

We are a collaborative Regional Adoption Agency delivering comprehensive adoption services across Kent, Bexley, and Medway to provide:

- Recruitment and assessment of adopters.
- Matching and placement of children.
- Post-adoption support including therapeutic interventions.
- Advisory services for professionals and families.
- Panel coordination for adoption decisions.
- Access to external commissioned services for extended support, including support for birth families and staying in contact through CAFIS Barnardos.

The service is designed to ensure children in care find permanent, loving homes efficiently and adoptive families receive the support they need throughout their journey.

Our service is led by a Head of Service, supported by the Adoption Support Service Manager, Pre-Order Service Manager and Adoption Advisory Officer comprising of the following teams:

Advisory team: Handles initial enquiries, peer support, and enquires about support for families.

Panel team: Supports decision-making and panel processes for child matches and adopter approvals.

Early permanence and assessment team: Identifies children suitable for adoption early and supports adoption care planning. Recruits and support adopters for the early permanence scheme.

Recruitment and assessment teams (one and two): Focus on recruiting and assessing adopters and support prospective adopters.

Family finding team: Family finds and matches children with suitable adopters, working collaboratively with children's social workers.

Adoption support teams (one, two and three): Provide therapeutic and social work support to adoptive families.

Service Delivery

Adoption Partnership Southeast is working collaboratively with Bexley, Kent and Medway children's teams to ensure children's plan for adoption are progressed and families receive adoption support when it is needed.

A Placement Order is the legal order granted when a court agrees adoption should be the care plan for a child. 67 Placement Orders were granted in 2024-2025, an increase on the 57 from 2023 and 2024. 43 Kent children were matched with adopters during 2024 and 2025. We completed adopter assessments for 63 households during 2024-2025.

Adoption support provided 105 support and advice line calls to families in 2024-2025 and 160 support assessments for families. In 2024 and 2025, a total of 497 adoption and special guardianship support fund applications, including pre-order, were made for parents in the region.

Highlights

In 2025, there was a significant amount of innovation taking place within the service in collaboration with Bexley, Kent, and Medway to strengthen the adoption work to ensure children are at the centre of all our work. Innovative projects funded by the Department for Education to ensure service developments and positive outcomes for children and their families:

- **Early permanence wraparound support:** Enhanced support for carers and birth parents, with positive feedback.
- **Enhanced matching for siblings:** Focused recruitment, training, and support for sibling adopters; 43 households approved for sibling groups.
- **Multi-disciplinary adoption support:** Expanded internal therapy offer, improved multi-agency collaboration, and positive feedback.
- Adopter recruitment and achieving permanency for children.
- **Early permanence:** 28% of children placed through early permanence, exceeding the 20% target.
- **Adopter sufficiency:** 63 households approved, with 61 of 62 children placed with in-house adopters.
- Timescale for children being matched with adopters is significantly lower than the national average.
- Stage two assessments completed faster than national average.
- Participation events taking place across the region with 288 attendees, including fundays, pantomimes and biannual family events.
- **Peer support scheme:** 42 peer volunteers supporting nearly 200 families.
- **Adopter-led community groups:** 10 active groups and a growing online community.
- **Voice and influence groups:** Youth, adoptive parent and birth parent reference groups influencing service delivery and policy.

Adoption support services saw 850 support interventions delivered in 2024-2025 which is up from 512 the previous year. There was a wide range of therapeutic and parenting support programmes and timely response to family's access to support.

We joined Adoption England's *Becoming a Family* approach, launched in 2024, this enhances support for adoptive families during the first 12–18 months post-placement. This period is vital for building attachment, confidence in parenting and long-term stability. Key aims include:

- Supporting therapeutic parenting and early bonding.
- Building resilience through peer and social networks.
- Providing tailored, multi-agency support.
- Ensuring consistent support across regions.
- Adoption social workers play a central role in preparing families to feel confident, connected and equipped to meet their child's needs by the time the adoption order is granted.

Learning, Development and Support

A range of opportunities for parents to access training are provided by our adoption support teams, which include:

- Incredible years training, (12-week course).
- Non-violent resistance course (10-week course).

- Sensory integration (6-week course).
- Therapeutic parenting - understanding developmental trauma (12-week course).
- Life story workshops (2-day course).
- Monthly social work lead support group meetings.

Training and Practice Development for Professionals

- **Dyadic developmental practice:** Embedded across our service, with 15 social workers trained to Level 2.
- **Professional training events:** High attendance and positive feedback from regional webinars and workshops.

Conference

We held an online conference for adoptive parents and professionals on 22nd October 2024. The theme of the conference was *Working Together to Develop Multi-Disciplinary Approaches to Adoption Support*. Sarah Naish, CEO and Founder of the Centre for Excellence in Child Trauma spoke on *My Journey Through Therapeutic Parenting* and our short film *Adoption Community* was premiered. The conference was a huge success with over 200 attendees and over 300 further views of the recording.

Feedback and Continuous Improvement

- High satisfaction in pre and post order surveys.
- Three complaints received, down from 7 in 2024, with clear learning actions taken.
- Catch-up calls initiative launched to maintain long-term engagement with adoptive families.



Total Placement Service

We are a one stop shop designed to find homes for all our children in care and care experienced young people. Most recently the service incorporated procuring care and support in the home packages for those children and young people with disabilities. There are several different types of homes for our children and young people:

- **Foster Homes:** We have access to both our in house foster carers and Independent Fostering Agency homes for those up to 18 years old. These are procured via a framework and spot purchasing. Some children continue to live with their carers up to 21 years old in what is called a Staying Put arrangement.
- **Residential childrens homes:** These are for children aged up to 18 years old, generally homes will be for between one and six children. These homes are spot purchased and we are to try and find homes within Kent for our children although this is not always possible due to the number of children from other local authorities being placed in Kent, which is on average 1,250 children.
- **Secure accommodation** is a secure environment where children and young people live to mitigate significant risk and to safeguard them, a court order is required to access this provision.
- **Supported accommodation:** These homes are for young people aged 16 to 21 years old to support them during their transition to independence. There are several types: low, medium and high needs which are determined by the number of support hours a young person will receive within a shared accommodation model via a block contract. Our own Kent Supported Homes and Shared Lives schemes offer a home with a host in the hosts own home with varying degrees of support according to need. Supported accommodation and semi-independent is spot purchased providing shared living in a house with staff available to provide varying levels of support.
- **Parents and their child(ren)** can be placed in specialist foster and residential homes for the purpose of assessment and to teach parenting skills. Generally, these placements are directed by the court when the authority is in proceedings regarding the child(ren).
- From time to time, exceptionally, when we cannot find a home for a child or young person we may have to use an **unregulated care arrangement**. This is unlawful and can only be considered with Director authorisation. There was significant progress in reducing the number of unregulated care arrangements with increased oversight and focus on this area of work. All other homes are regulated by Ofsted or the Care Quality Commission.

The key elements that support positive outcomes and stable homes for our children and young people are:

- High quality placement plan referrals that garner interest from carers and providers and encourage them to offer homes.
- Effective and considered matching of carers and children and young people to ensure children and young people's needs can be understood and met.
- Clarity, commitment and delivery of the child or young persons agreed care plan or pathway plan by everyone involved.

Placement finding can take a long time and be difficult for some children due to several factors:

- Number of other local authority children placement in Kent which is on average 1,250 children.
- The local, regional and national reduction in the number of foster carers and placements.
- Matching children to the right carer(s) and alongside other children.
- The lack of specialist placements to provide care for children with complex needs.
- The lack of solo placements.
- The lack of secure accommodation.
- The opening of home office funded provision of two children's homes with a further home due to open, and six reception centres for newly arrived children and young people, has eased the burden of needing to find placements at very short notice. Placement finding for these children and young people is now far more effective and efficient.

We contribute to three corporate parenting performance indicators:

- Three or more placement moves for a child in the last 12 months, in July 2025 this was 10.4%, .4% achieving below the desired target.
- Placement stability for last 2 years, in July 2025 this was 73.7%, 3.7% greater than the desired target.
- The number of children placed with 20 miles of home, in July this was 65.9%, 14.1% below the desired target.

Our service is currently undergoing a restructure to ensure it is efficient, effective and agile to changing need and demand. This includes automation of processes, improved oversight of costs leading to potential savings through the development and use of a benchmarking tool and revision of job descriptions to ensure the focus is on the service continuing to deliver a first-class placement finding service to our children and young people.



How Our Elected Members Can Get Involved

Our services welcome visits from elected members especially at our activity and celebration events when there is an opportunity to meet the children and young people in our care, for whom we are acting as their corporate parent. The Corporate Parenting Panel receive regular performance updates and we welcome questions from members to support their understanding of the role of a corporate parent. Kent Fostering Service would appreciate any support members can provide in promoting the recruitment of foster carers for KCC within their local constituency.

Christmas Campaign

Our Christmas campaign is now a yearly event. In December 2024, the campaign raised more than our £20k target, raising **£32k** by changing our campaign to broaden it out to both local and national businesses. This meant on Christmas Day every one of our Care Leavers received a Christmas card from their Corporate Parents with either a £10 gift voucher for them to treat themselves or a gift to the value of £10. These were well received by our care experienced adults, who said it made them feel very special to receive this in the post. In 2024, exceeding the target, enabled the service to put on Christmas Day dinner for 50 young adults who would otherwise have been alone.

This year's campaign will again focus on asking local businesses to support with financial donations. Due to the current financial pressures society is facing, we recognise we need to be sensitive about asking our Kent County Council staff for financial donations, whilst still giving those who can donate the opportunity to do this. Our target for 2025 is £25,000, with £5,000 of this will be used to give 100 young adult care leavers a Christmas Day to remember. Those that would otherwise be on their own will be invited for Christmas Day dinner with transport, gifts and entertainment provided.

To find out how you can donate, please click the below banner.



This banner will direct you to: <https://ylf.org.uk/christmas/>