

The logo for East Sussex County Council is located on the left side of the page. It consists of a large white circle with a thick, textured orange border. Inside the circle, the text "East Sussex" is written in a bold, dark blue font, and "County Council" is written below it in a smaller, dark blue font. Below the text is a stylized orange graphic made of three horizontal rows of wavy lines, resembling a sun or a stylized landscape.

East Sussex
County Council

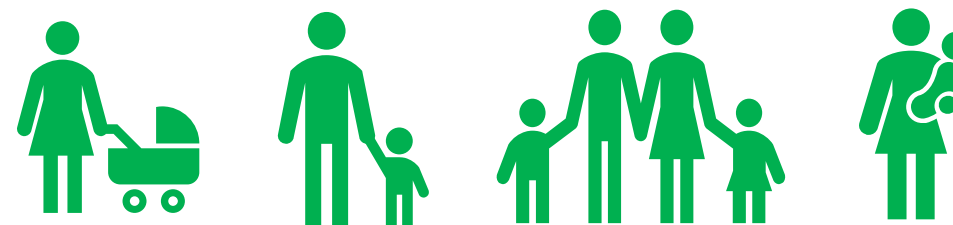
East Sussex Fostering Services
Annual Progress Report
2022/23

Fostering Duty



601 placements were made during 2022/23
80.7% of these placements were in-house

The Placement Duty Service maintained strong in-house placement levels with **80.7% in 2022/23 vs. 84% in 2021/22**



Statistics	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Matching referrals completed	461	519	736
Agency placements	74	68	116
In-house foster placements	277	356	485
Not required	110	95	135

High Intensive Supported Accommodation

High Intensive Supported Accommodation provides for young people aged 16+ who may require significant support whilst in placement.

As part of the Fostering Service since March 2020, the ESCC High Intensive Service continues to oversee and ensure quality provision.

In 2023 we are launching a new approved provider list (CSAAL) which will reinvigorate the market for 16+ provision and ensure confidence that all providers meet quality standards.

The High Intensive Service is working with current and prospective providers to support them through OFSTED registration in line with the 2023 Supported Accommodation Regulations.

170 referrals received for High Intensive accommodation of which **165** young people were placed.

We work with some providers who have particular skills and resources to meet the specific needs of UASC.

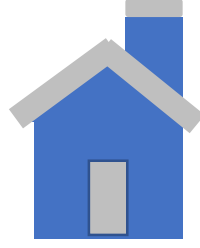
2022-2023 High Intensive Placements by Provider		
	SAF/High-Intensive (Utopia, LCS, My Life, DTA, Pathfinders, Nelbro, BPL etc)	UASC Providers (Enthum, Cranmead, St Christophers, PTI)
Children from ESCC	81	
Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children	48	36



Fostering Recruitment

The data provided is a final snapshot as of 31st March 2023

24 new foster homes,
40 placements created



East Sussex Fostering Service continues to meet the national challenge of recruiting foster carers particularly those interested in caring for babies or offering respite. Recruitment of carers for children with more complex needs or who are older has been increasingly difficult.

The Marketing and Communications Officer has provided a targeted, comprehensive marketing strategy designed to recruit both experienced foster carers and applicants new to fostering.

The fostering maintenance payment uplift from 1st April 2023 is a positive step which was welcomed by existing foster carers. The commitment to enhance payments to equal the national minimum (NMA) will help to retain our existing foster carer resource and encourage new applications.

Incentive payments to foster carers signposting friends and family to become ESCC foster carers continues and is seen as a valuable part of our overall recruitment strategy.

Recruitment				
	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Enquiries	268	227	200	274
Q&A calls	114	92	68	79
Initial visits	71	42	32	43
Approvals	22	20	14	24
Placements	39	30	21	40
Conversion rate Enquiry to approval	8%	9%	6%	7%
Conversion rate Screening call to approval	19%	22%	16%	24%
Conversion rate Initial visit to approval	31%	48%	34%	44%

The significant increase in conversion rate can be attributed to potential applicants being provided with more relevant information supporting them to make an informed decision at the start of the process, with 44% continuing their application to approval.

Fostering Recruitment (Continued)

- Google Adverts - Covid Recovery Funded Project

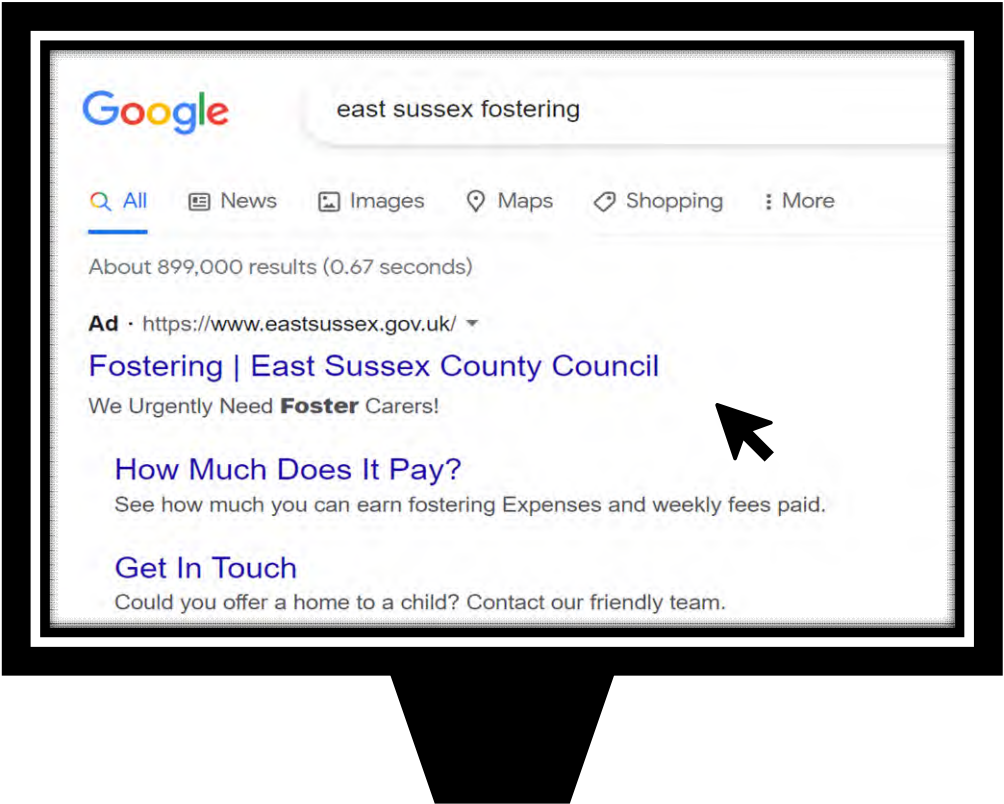
East Sussex has invested funding to improve ESCC Fostering’s position on “Google Ad Keyword Searches”.

Carers transferring to ESCC had often advised that the presenting order of Google search results was a factor in their previous decisions to enquire with agencies.

- Fostering Friendly Employer Scheme

ESCC have implemented this as HR policy formalising the additional time off an ESCC employee is entitled to for the attendance of fostering related meetings.

- Other initiatives existing and targeted for 2023/2024:



With applicants and enquirers who previously did not progress if it was not the right time for them.



In discussion and to be explored in 23/24 for approved foster carers



Upgraded content on the ESCC website and social media profiles.



Live online information sessions and revised schedule of community and pop-up locations for “Vinnie-the-Van”



New scripts for ad’s targeting diversity and parent and child applicants.



i.e. roundabout and lamppost banners.



Fostering flyers posted to 110,000 homes across East Sussex.

Fostering Recognition and Retention

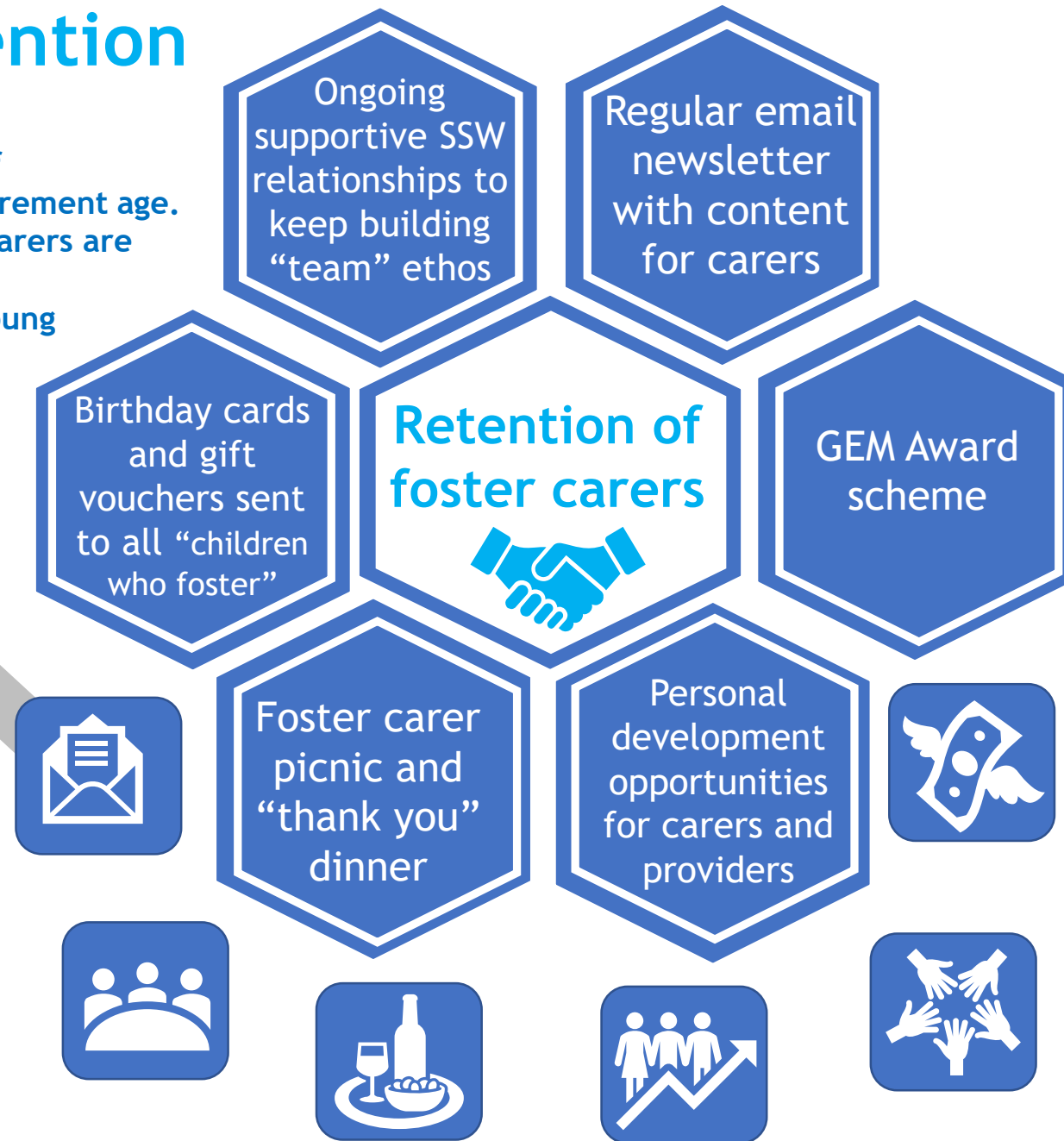
- East Sussex foster carers tend to be highly committed to the Service.
- The age profile of East Sussex foster carers continues to be an area of vulnerability with a high percentage of carers being at or close to retirement age.
- We are not recruiting new carers at the same rate that experienced carers are leaving the role.
- A majority of retiring carers have remained with the service to see young people through to independence.

243
Fostering
Households
caring for 417
looked after
children

As of
31st March 2022

225
Fostering
Households
Caring for 396
looked after
children

As of
31st March 2023



Supported Lodgings

East Sussex Fostering Service has been one of the first Local Authorities to extend the registration of appropriate supported lodgings providers to become foster carers. Hybrid foster carers are able to provide placements for young people under the age of 16, increasing our fostering resource and providing stability for children who enter care close to their 16th birthday.

As at 31st March 2023 we had:

33 registered supported lodgings providers.

- We increased by 6 new households in 22/23.
- 9 of these providers were approved as “hybrid”
- 24 providers cared for young people aged 16+ only.
- 1 household was being assessed.

In 22/23 Supported Lodgings received
220 placement referrals

- 102 Young people were placed in Supported Lodgings
- 3 of these young people were Homeless (18+)
- 7 were Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
- 92 were Looked After Children.



From a recently retired SL provider of 23 years:

“The Supported Lodgings team are brilliant. You always get support, that’s what you need.”

“Every one of the young people is different, getting to know them is lovely. I want to see a bright future for them.”

Support and Supervision of Foster Carers

“Pod-based Supervision / Support system”

- Provides an opportunity for Supervising Social Workers (SSWs) to have an understanding and overview of carers supported and supervised by their colleagues.
- Interim and emergency support to cover sick leave and annual leave can be provided by other SSWs through an SSW duty system.

Partnership working

- Strong partnership working with Looked After Children’s Teams, LACAMHS, Virtual School and Placement Support Service.
- Important in supporting foster carers, sustaining placements and attempting to meet the complex needs of looked after children and young people.

Creative Practice

- SSWs are encouraged to think creatively on how best to support our foster carers, for example through e-learning, linking with other foster carers, watching a podcast, specific advice on therapeutic care or attending a support group.
- Focus is on placement stability and children and young people are at the heart of our practice.

Out of hours Advice Line

- The Service deals with a range of issues such as placement disruptions, young people missing from placement or advice in managing young people's behaviours.
- It is available 365 days a year to support our carers.

Support Groups

The Fostering team recognise that connecting carers enabling them to share their experiences and knowledge is a valuable part of their support.

In September we are re-launching the Eastbourne support group and the facilitators are looking forward to developing connections and support for foster carers.

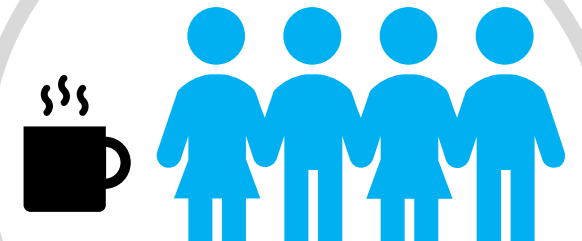


Our long-established Uckfield support group continues to be a success and has welcomed many new members this year, in addition to the regular attendees.



The Hastings hub (support group) was launched this year. This monthly meet up is well attended, and carers have reported finding it helpful to meet up with other carers.

There are plans to get the 'Men Who Foster' group up and running in the Autumn time.



Young People Who Foster Relaunch



YPWF events are for birth, SGO and adopted children or relatives of East Sussex foster carers. Events normally have a minimum age of 8 up to 17. YPWF support aims to provide young people respite away from their fostering household and the chance to mix with other young people who share similar experiences.

2022/23 has seen relaunch of YPWF, we have a core attendee group of around 12 children but have expanded events to reach other young people who did not previously attend. We have new members attending each event, including children of connected carers, and have up to 15-20 depending on the activity.

YPWF are now running monthly sessions, these include a mix of fun opportunities to socialise with other young people who foster, including bowling, rounders and indoor climbing, in addition to our new 'support sessions' which are learning & sharing events based around supporting them with the emotional impact of fostering. The new, trauma-informed support sessions run twice yearly and are based around what young people have told us they want to understand & talk more about.

We have also had a range of staff volunteers from different fostering teams help out at events, this has given staff on a wider scale the opportunity to hear directly from YPWF and take this back into their own practice & teams when working with fostering families.

We have also sent out Christmas thank you gifts, run online sessions to gather young people's views, plans to involve YPWF in our fostering recruitment film to be launched for Foster Care Fortnight 2023 and also in designing helpful resources for new fostering families.

Foster Carer Training 2022/23

Mandatory

All mandatory courses were re-written for September 2022 and are now as follows:

- Attachment
- Core Skills (including impact of trauma, Therapeutic Parenting, LSW)
- Discussing Race in Fostering
- Online Safety
- Safeguarding
- Safer Caring
- Supporting Contact

Wellbeing

- Introduced Trauma and Wellbeing Workshops focusing on the impact on carers of caring for a child whose experienced trauma and the impact of moving them on.
- Wellbeing retreat joint project with ESFCA.
- Targeted support and mandatory training highlighting the importance of self-care.
- The wellbeing segment underpins retention.

Bitesize

- Hyperlinked resources within the training slides sent to carers after each training course.
- Promoting the existing e-learning as a supportive resource for learning.

Deep Dive

More specialist/in-depth training including:

- Moving Children to Adoption (UEA) delivered to 171 carers and SSWs across Sussex, Surrey and Brighton (and hosted here)
- Managing Allegations
- Changing Chances Empowerment Approach

Foster Carer Training Stats 2022/23

- We reviewed our training offer and now provide a more structured approach with improved clarity on expectations for mandatory training.
- **248 mandatory course places** were accessed by foster carers since the training has been re-written (September 2022 - March 2023).
- There have been 34 foster carers on the in depth/specialist 'Deep Dive' courses.
- The number of e-learning courses accessed by foster carers this year is 99 which has **gone up 29.6%** from 78 last year.
- The total number of places taken up by foster carers on all of our training courses this year was **828** (April 2022 to March 2023) compared to 699 last year.
- **Uptake of foster carer training is up 18.5%** from last year.

Raising the Importance of our Children's Identity



Race in Fostering training was made a mandatory course for foster carers from September 2022.

Life Story Work training alongside Social Workers starting from June 2023.

Allsorts LGBTQ+ training booked for next year

Currently exploring the Black Care Experience Charter and Replenish boxes for our children and young people who are not White British.

Anytime resource bank will include videos and podcasts relevant to understanding identity for Looked After Children.

Future developments of our training offer

Survey July 2023 - to gain views on what is needed to support foster carers to complete their training with a continuing focus on **ownership** and **ease** of access.

New additions in our 4 key areas:

➤ **Mandatory training** - more course dates with more evening options available

➤ **Wellness** - More wellbeing events/retreats, wellbeing booklet

➤ **Bitesize** - Bi-monthly webinar programme, Fostering Anytime resource bank to go live with the online Foster Carer Handbook.

➤ **Deep Dive** - More specialist/ in-depth training including LGBTQ+, Life Story Work, Applying Attachment Theory in Play, modular approach to the Empowerment Approach Changing Chances training.

Pressures on Foster Carers

Carers subject to allegations and standards of care:

2021-22 = 28

2022-23 = 46

Percentage increase = 64%

The challenges of sufficiency and placement availability have resulted in additional pressures on foster carers.

Fostering households are managing increased numbers of children with more complex needs, and challenges regarding compatibility with other children in their care.

The significant increase in carers subject to allegations and standards of care is thought to be due to these pressures.

Foster Carer Feedback

"I found it motivational, evidence based, attachment and trauma focused and was the essence of connective practice. I hope that this can be shared amongst all foster carers and social workers."
- UEA Moving Children to Adoption

Training Feedback:

"At the end of the course we reviewed the initial aims, and we could clearly see that the course objectives had been achieved" - Safer caring

"It's so good to see the massive improvement and range in the training on offer. The ones I've done so far have been very good and I've signed up for all the online mandatory courses."

"I would not change anything, it was perfect. I hope more carers get to experience such a wonderful day." - Wellbeing retreat

SSW Feedback:

"We could not do any of this without you your support and your on- going working relationship with us is amazing and we really appreciate it."

"Our SSW works very closely with our family, I feel she trusts me to know my limits, she prompts me regularly to ensure I stay on top of my paperwork, she is always honest with me, even if it's not what I want to hear, because she knows us well enough to say when something isn't right for us, however, if something is right, I feel 100% supported by her."

I would find it extremely difficult without the amazing support I have from my SSW. She is always very reflective, thoughtful and professional. She responds quickly to any queries or problems I have. She often provides new insights, information or signposts me to things she thinks I might be interested in or would find helpful in my fostering practice. I really enjoy and benefit from our supervisions and look forward to being able to talk things over with her.

The GRACES model:

G - Gender, Gender Identity, Geography, Generation

R - Race, Religion

A - Age, Ability, Appearance

C - Class, Culture, Caste

E - Education, Ethnicity, Economics

S - Spirituality, Sexuality, Sexual Orientation

Equality, Diversity, and the identity needs of our looked after children, foster carers, and supported lodgings providers

- Anti-racist and anti-discriminatory practice embedded throughout the service - training, resources and seminars disseminated during 2022/23.
- Encouraging and supporting staff to challenge discrimination.
- Staff practicing the GRACES model to explore what identity means to their supported lodgings providers/foster carers and how they can meet the identity and diversity needs of our children.
- Staff ensuring that they speak with supported lodgings providers/foster carers about assumptions, prejudice and unconscious bias and any implications for fostering.
- Open discussions about our own unconscious bias in practice and ongoing discussions re: identity needs in supervision.
- Redevelopment of “caring for Black and Ethnic Minority Children” booklet.



Placement Support Service

Placement Support continues to work with some of the most vulnerable cared for young people, whose placements could be at risk of breakdown.

The service works closely with our Fostering Duty team to support short term emergency placements, by having workers who are on a weekend rota.

The Placement Support Service works closely with the Virtual School to support cared for young people and those on the 'edge of care' (EOC) who are excluded or on a part-time timetable at school.

The Placement Support Service continues to support some of our young people in the Through Care Team, who maybe living independently, living in-house residentially or with an external agency.



Feedback from other professionals:

"Without you and your team 'our' and our foster carers job would not be possible." (SSW)

"Thank you for your support and can I say what an amazing support S is to M, the way they work with her is something to be admired." (SW in training)

Placement Support Service

(continued)

100
Packages
of Support
Delivered

- Placement Support - **77** support packages
- Parent & Baby - **1** support package
- Through Care Team - **17** support packages to care leavers
- Edge of care - **5** support packages to families
- Reviews held - 65
- Set ups held - 17
- Worker ended - 26
- Virtual School sessions - 316, supporting 26 young people

*"Wonderful activities
in the holidays."*

*"We could not ask
for a better
service from our
PSW's, one can
never over rate
kindness and
commitment."*

*"Couldn't fault the
support we receive."*

*"They just make the
difference; I think the
support helps me to not feel
overwhelmed."*

Feedback from our evaluations:

*"Amazing service, I don't think we
would have coped without it at times."*

*"We couldn't continue without the
support; PSS has been the answer to
our success as foster carers to our
young adult."*

Children in Care Council

- **SUSS it (Speak up Sessions)**

36 activities giving 66 young people the opportunity to speak out and speak up if they wanted too. Through this engagement 48 young people have asked for help with individual issues.

- **Digital Ambassadors**

Involved in the digital care project being run by East Sussex County Council to train, update and promote resources for keeping cared for children safe and resilient online. They have had the opportunity to work with the newest virtual reality technology and use 3D printers.

- **National Participation**

7 CICC members along with 87 cared for young people from all over the UK, attended a day at Westminster to lobby Parliament about important issues.

Our young people raised concerns around education and placement stability with one member having a one-on-one discussion with the education secretary at the time Nadhim Zahawi.



the children in care council

Children in Care Council

(Continued)

- **Partnership Working - Youth Cabinet**

The CICC and the youth cabinet joint together to support a refresh of the East Sussex children and young people's plan and its priorities at the annual trust event. This was attended by several youth voice groups as well as adult decision makers.

- **Volunteering**

All CICC members have received framed certificates for the volunteering hours they have completed this year for their CICC role and work in their local communities. In total, as a group they have completed **1224** volunteering hours over the past **12** months.



Priorities for 2023/24

Review of foster payment schedules to ensure that more children in care are able to experience a family-based placement

Marketing strategy aimed at promoting and encouraging the recruitment of applicants new to foster care

Development of a robust commissioning process for provision of bespoke placements to ensure that agencies are providing a safe and appropriate service

Prioritise carers' well-being through training and support

Continue to work in partnership with LAC and locality teams to support the reunification of young people with their families

Focus on the stability and retention of our current fostering resource

Placement Support Service to continue to expand into edge of care

Work with providers to meet new Supported Accommodation Regulations to ensure no loss of capacity.

Needs-led approach to placement searches, matching and referrals

Glossary (ESCC Fostering Service) - Part 1 of 2

Fostering Duty - Team who oversee placement finding for looked after children and young people.

Assessment, Recruitment and Retention Team (ART) - Responsible team for advertising and recruitment of ESCC Foster Carers (enquiries to approval) and retention.

Assessing Social Worker (ASW) - Undertakes assessments of potential foster carers.

Children In Care Council (CICC) - A group of East Sussex looked after young people aged between 13 and 18. They meet up regularly to have their say on issues that matter to young people in care.

Connected Foster Carer - Carers approved for specific child, often a family member.

Edge of Care - Proactive work with vulnerable families to prevent children and young people becoming looked after.

High Intensive Supported Accommodation (HI) - Supported accommodation for older young people (16+).

Placement Support Service (PSS) - Service that provide packages of support to placements through a combination of both individual and group work to encourage young people to develop positive trusting relationships/attachments.

Glossary (ESCC Fostering Service) - Part 2 of 2

Special Guardianship Order (SGO) - Permanence option. Foster Carers can apply to be Special Guardians of their Foster Children after 1 year.

Special Placement Scheme (SPS) - Service that offer long-term Foster placements to particularly hard to place, troubled Young people who can benefit from a therapeutic parenting style.

Supervising Social Worker (SSW) - Support and supervise foster carers.

Supported Lodgings (SL) - Placements for young people aged 16 and above who are homeless or living in care.

Supported Accommodation Framework (SAF)

Through Care Team (TCT) - Responsible for supporting young people across the county while they prepare to leave care and after they leave.

UASC - Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.

Young People Who Foster Council (YPWF) - Birth children of Foster Carers.