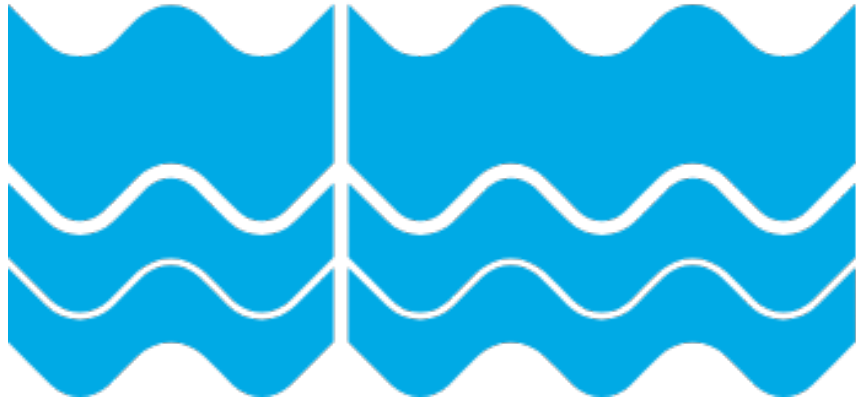




**East Sussex**  
County Council



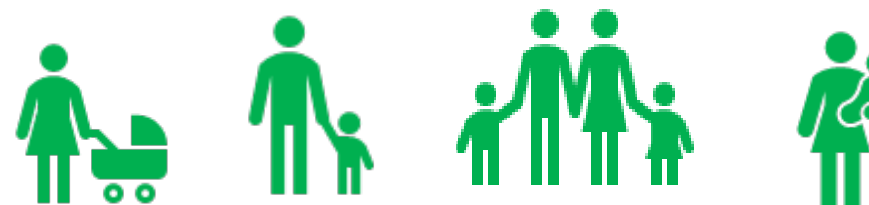
# East Sussex Fostering Services Annual Progress Report 2023/24

# Fostering Duty



**639 placements were made during 2023/24**  
**70% of these placements were in house**

The data provided reflects activity 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024



The Placement Duty Service maintained their in-house placements with 70% in 2023/24 vs. 80.7% in 2022/23

- ❖ 109 Bridging placements
- ❖ 639 Placement matches (138 ultimately not required)
- ❖ 520 Completed referrals

Statistics	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Matching referrals completed	461	519	601	777
Agency placements	74	68	116	192
In-house foster placements	277	356	485	447
Not required	110	95	135	138

# Commissioning



- This reporting year saw the development of a dedicated commissioning team.
- The commissioning team has recruited a dedicated Children's Placement Officer and a Senior Commissioning Officer to support the development of the team.
- The Commissioning team is tasked with the monitoring, review and support of bespoke packages and unregistered placements, and the overview of Commissioned frameworks across fostering, residential and High Intensive provision.
- The Commissioning team are currently scoping out the work that exists with the Looked After and Locality Children's Service, to ascertain what could be best supported by the current team.
- The aim of the team is to ensure needs led, high quality provision for children and young people, that achieves best value for the Local Authority.
- The Commissioning team are looking to build knowledge and skills via training opportunities in the coming year.

# High Intensive Supported Accommodation

- High Intensive accommodation is for young people, over 16 who need enhanced support to achieve independence. It has been coordinated by the Fostering Service since 2020.
- ESCC framework for 16+ provision is live, with the aim of ensuring needs led, high quality accommodation that provides best value for the Local Authority.
- ESCC is working with current and prospective providers to support them through their OFSTED registration, in line with the 2023 supported accommodation regulations.

Young People Placed with High Intensive Providers		
	East Sussex Children	Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
2022/23	81	84
2023/24	73	85

There was a total of **177** referrals received for High Intensive accommodation in 2023/24 compared to **170** last year. of which **158** were placed, compared to **165** last year.





# Fostering Recruitment

The data provided is a final snapshot as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024

**26** new foster homes, **38** places created



ESCC Fostering continues to meet the national challenge of recruiting foster carers.

Through a multi-channel strategy, and with insights from new research, we have identified and planned the most effective routes to drive quality enquiries to recruit both experienced foster carers and new fostering applicants to ESCC. Wellbeing and recognition schemes have also enhanced loyalty and retention within our existing cohort of carers.

New payment structure and revision of maintenance payments has been introduced to foster carers for implementation from 1st April 2024 with commitment for payments to keep pace in line with the National Minimum Allowance. ESCC is now more competitive in terms of payments with neighbouring LA's and IFA's encouraging more new applications, transfers and retaining the existing cohort.

Recruitment					
	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Enquiries	260	228	200	274	236
Q&A calls	106	95	69	79	71
Initial visits	68	48	33	43	45
Approvals	22	20	14	24	26
Places	39	30	21	40	38
Conversion rate Enquiry to IV	26%	21%	16%	16%	19%
Conversion rate Enquiry to approval	8%	9%	7%	9%	11%
Conversion rate Initial visit to approval	32%	42%	42%	56%	58%

With relevant, informative messaging, enquirers and applicants have been well prepared at the start of their research and well supported into the assessment process. This has led to a significant increase in approval conversions. 58% of applicants continued their application from initial visit to panel approval.

# Fostering Recruitment (Continued)

- **South East Regional Hub (DfE and Seslip)**

ESCC will join forces in partnership with 19 other local authorities to launch a new regional fostering recruitment hub with a shared goal - to recruit and support more foster carers for our communities' children. The virtual hub will compliment existing recruitment activity across the region from July 2024.



- **Fostering logo refresh**

Ensuring the ESCC brand stands out amongst other local authority fostering service logos in regional advertising activity.

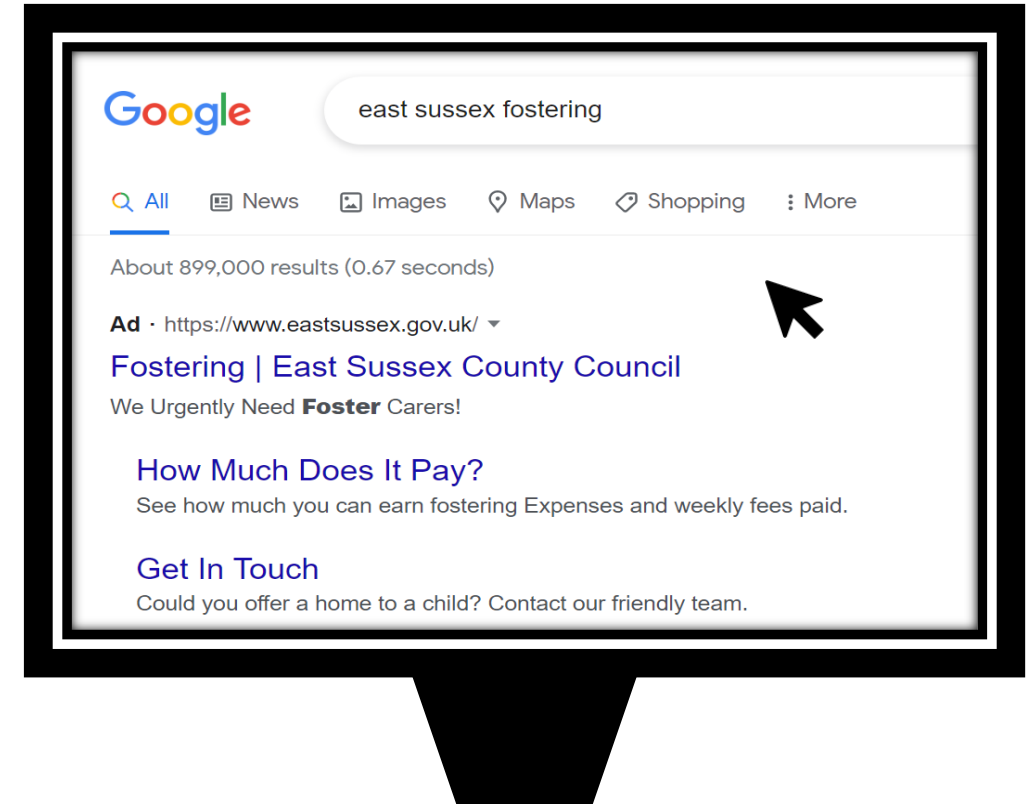
- **Supported Lodgings re-brand to Fostering 16+**

Maintaining the identity of the specialist support service for 16+ foster carers whilst bringing adolescent fostering under the mainstream fostering service umbrella for enquiry handling and assessments.

- **Instagram launch** to increase followers and share in a younger market.

- **Networking 'word-of-mouth' campaigns**

Use of ESCC's corporate channels and Lead Member networks to achieve maximum exposure across the the county eg. ESCC Term Dates web page and Full Council Meeting February 2024 all elected members were supplied with promotional collateral kits to distribute in their parishes.



- **Google Adverts**

Continued online search presence with sponsored ad campaigns. Vital to be visible in a crowded commercial marketplace to those considering transferring from their existing agency and those at the start of their fostering research journey.

# Fostering Recruitment (Continued)

## Other initiatives existing and targeted for 2024/2025:



- **ESCC Staff referral scheme**
  - **Foster Carer incentive scheme**
- Payments to foster carers and ESCC staff for signposting friends and family from their network to apply as foster carers continues and as seen as a valuable part of our overall recruitment strategy.



### **Website refresh to launch June 2024**

Continually updated fresh content on the web pages and social media profiles with paid and organic posts and campaigns. Explore new platforms to ensure we are being seen where our audience are spending time online.



### **Recruitment events and 'keeping in touch' (KIT)**

Continue to offer live online 'virtual' information sessions and a schedule of community recruitment pop-up locations with team members and 'Vinnie-the-Van' at high footfall locations. Follow-up with applicants unable to progress at the time with KIT newsletter.



### **Advertising**

Review of historical and ongoing outdoor advertising media contracts to plan for 2024/25 budgets.

Five new scripted radio campaigns across Global and More Radio networks targeting recruitment for diverse, parent and child and adolescent placement applicants.



### **Council tax postal mailout**

Fostering flyers posted out to an increased circulation in March 2024 reaching 171,000 East Sussex households across Hastings, Eastbourne and Wealden councils.

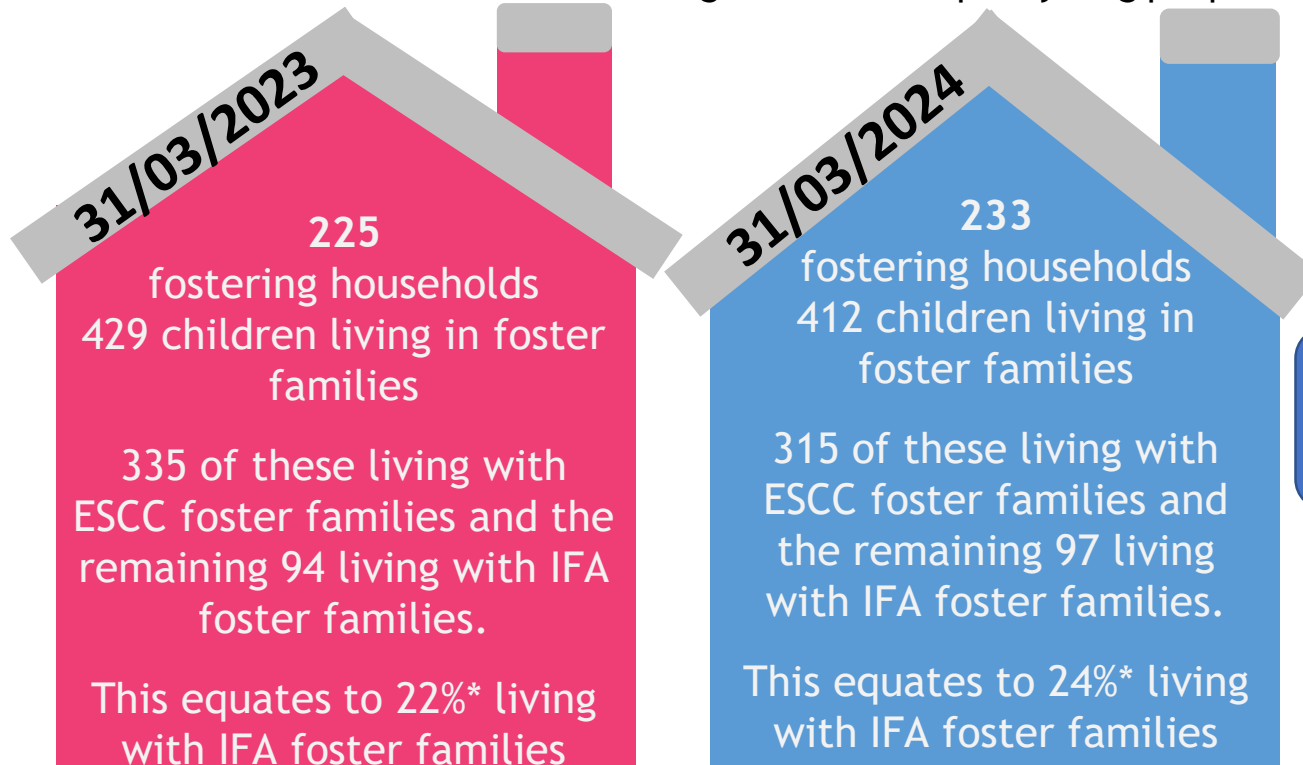


### **Council tax discount or exemptions, Council car park discounts, Fostering Friendly Employer status, Retail and Leisure discounts**

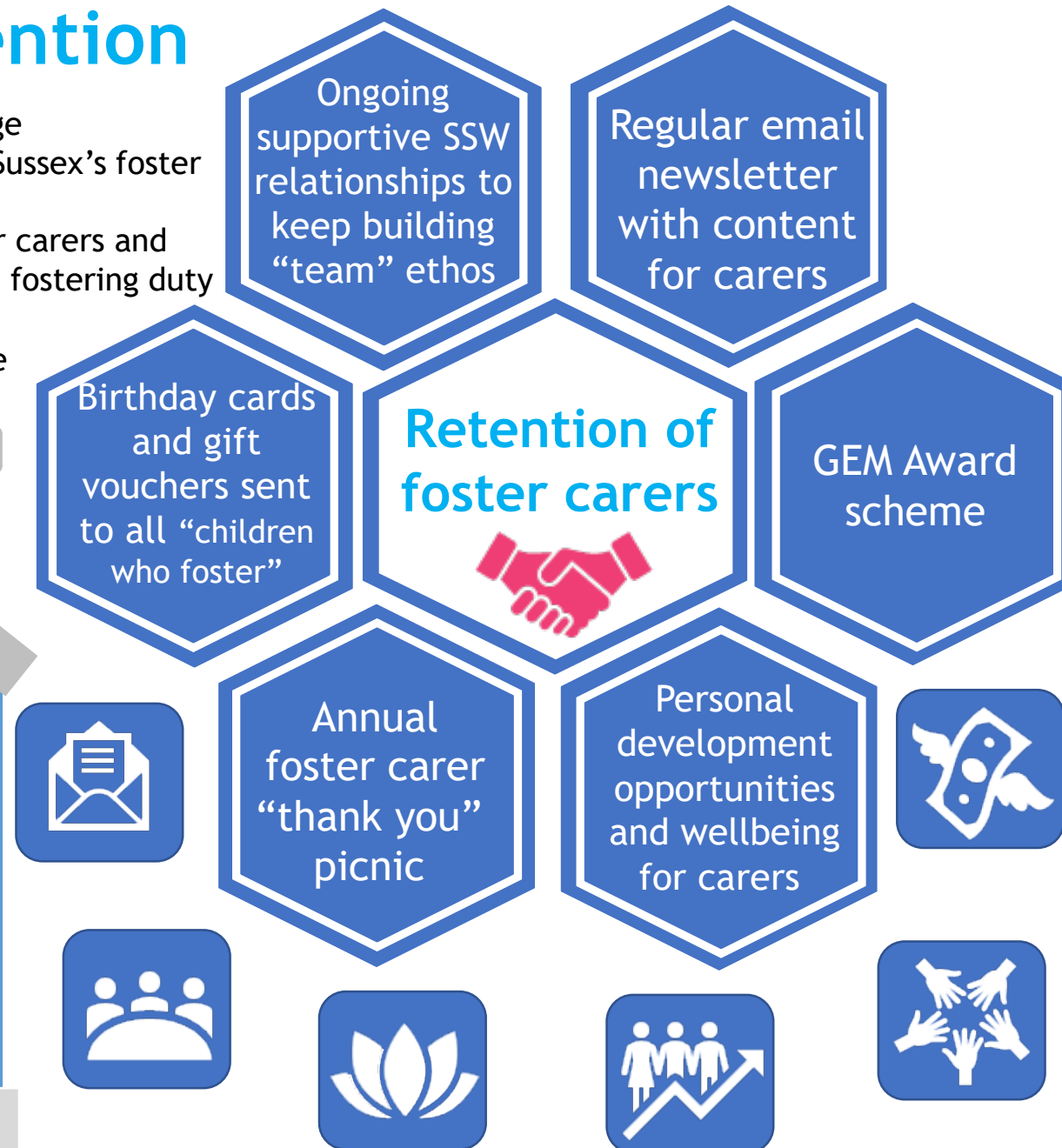
Working with districts, boroughs, local Businesses and ESCC HR department to achieve added-value for in-house ESCC foster carers in the future.

# Fostering Recognition and Retention

- As common with a number of Local Authorities and fostering agencies age demographics continues to be an area of vulnerability in retaining East Sussex's foster carers, with many carers deciding to retire from fostering.
- The service is seeing an increase in the approval of family/friends foster carers and carers transferring from IFAs and both of these increase capacity for the fostering duty service.
- The decreased ratio of households to cared for young people is reflective of the fact that foster carers are caring for more complex young people.



\*ESCC figures are significantly lower than the national average of 47%, on 31/3/23, rising from 42% in 2019 (Fostering Statistics - Gov.uk)



# 16+ Fostering & Supporting Independence Team

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In October 2023, following new government regulations introduced around the provision of supported accommodation to 16/17 year old care leavers and young people in care, East Sussex County Council responded to this by way of approving all of our existing active Supported Lodgings providers as '16+ foster carers'. This also led to a change of name for the team, now called '16+ Fostering and Supporting Independence Team'

In October 2023, due to a robust and comprehensive approval conversion process, we successfully converted 14 additional households to 16+ foster carers, in addition to those who were already hybrid carers. The total available households within this service is now 43.

There will be a focus on the year ahead in recruiting carers to this refreshed service.



*"My supervising social worker gives me good support and makes me feel part of the team"*

*(LS: Foster carer and Staying Put carer)*



# 16+ Fostering & Supporting Independence Team

- The 16+ SIT supervisor responsibility rose from 33 to 43 fostering households, made up of the following approval types:
  - ❑ Mainstream fostering households
  - ❑ Hybrid carer households (combined approval as foster carers and the previous approval as supported lodgings providers)
  - ❑ 16+ fostering households
  - ❑ Staying Put arrangements
  - ❑ New approval's & fostering assessments
- 140 direct placement referrals were received
- 80 young people were placed with SIT carers.
- From October 2023, referrals were rerouted through Duty Placement Service.

Of those placed these included:

- ❑ UASC placements
- ❑ Parent and baby support placement
- ❑ Homeless placement (16+)
- ❑ Respite placements
- ❑ Short term placements



“you've made me feel like a part of the family and I feel comfortable”  
(16 year old 'S' living with 16+ foster carers)

# Support and Supervision of Foster Carers

## Wrap Around Support

### **Dedicated to Supporting Carers**

- Our focus is on supporting carers to provide safe, stable and loving homes for our children.
- SSWs 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 and nurturing care, attending training or support groups.

### **Fostering Positive Relationships**

- Strong partnership with the Team Around the Child such as with Looked After Children's Teams, LACAMHS, Virtual School and Placement Support Service.
- These relationships are essential in supporting foster carers to meet the complex needs of our young people with a key focus on building up resilience.

### **Pod-based Supervision and Support**

- Provides an opportunity for Supervising Social Workers (SSWs) to have an understanding and overview of carers supported and supervised by colleagues in their Pod.
- Interim and emergency support to cover SSW absence is provided by other SSWs through the Pod or SSW duty system.

### **Out of Hours Advice Line**

- The Service deals with a range of issues such as supporting new carers, 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.

There are plans to develop the Support Groups further, considering guest speakers and opportunities for learning and development, as well as peer support.

The Fostering Buddy Scheme was re-launched earlier this year. There are now a group of 20 buddies, ready to support Foster Carer's of all levels of experience!

The Eastbourne Support Group started again in Autumn 2023. This has been a process of working closely with carers to develop a group which will suit the needs and expectations of attendees. This is gradually developing an established attendance of foster carers which is progressing positively.

There continues to be an established monthly Parent and Child Support Group, for our carers providing Parent and Child Foster Placements.

The 'Men Who Foster' Support Group was re-launched this year and is developing a group of regular attendees. It is hoped this will be a supportive space for our male foster carer's.

The Uckfield and Hastings Support Groups continue to be well-attended, with both new and established members. Carers continue to report finding these groups a helpful opportunity to meet others.



# Improving Practice

## Support and Supervision of Foster Carers

- Using a Valuing Care Tool to assist us with matching children with carers and identifying training needs.
- Updating our Supervision and Annual Review forms to ensure best practice.
- Piloting a “Mockingbird Constellation” to better support our foster carers.
- Development of a Fostering Dashboard to track our compliance and performance.
- Continued development of our Buddy Scheme to support carers.

# Additional Pressures on Foster Carers

Carers subject  
to allegations  
and standards  
of care:

2021-22 = 28  
2022-23 = 46  
2023-24 = 24

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2023 - 2024  
summary:

Allegations = 19  
Standards of care = 5  
Practice Issues = 5  
Exemptions = 13

It should be acknowledged that there have been ongoing pressures on foster carers arising from the challenge of sufficiency and placement availability. Carers are managing increased numbers of more complex children and caring for children outside of their preferred approval or who would not normally be matched to each other. We offer enhanced support to carers caring for children outside of their approval and specific training or direct work with carers around Practice issues.

# What do Foster Carers tell us about their SSWs?

*"I always really enjoy working with my SSW ... and find her so professional and thoughtful in her approach. She is always able to bring a clarity and perspective to situations"*

*"We got on very well with our SSW from the outset and look forward to her visits. She is always down to earth, easy to talk to and very supportive."*

*Our SSW is "always knowledgeable, supportive, professional and fair."*

*Our SSW "is by far, the best supervising social worker we have had in 16 years of fostering. Her support is excellent and extremely focused on our well being.  
... will always return messages/ emails and calls no matter what. Fostering needs people like her."*

*"We have a strong relationship. Our social worker is always on hand if we need her at any time via phone/text/email. She keeps us updated if she will be absent from work and who to contact if we require any support. She is highly positive regarding our work, and this goes a long way with us. She will follow up on agreed-upon notes from supervision meetings and is always willing to listen to us and our needs. We would like to thank ... for her ongoing support throughout our fostering journey."*

*"Our SSW is always very supportive, and we know that we can call her at anytime if we need to. She is very understanding of our personal life and understands what we want from fostering"*

*"We feel extremely happy with the support we receive from our SSW,...is always available to support and offer advice."*

# Young People Who Foster 2023/24



YPWF events are for birth, SGO and adopted children or relatives of East Sussex foster carers. Events are normally open for ages 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.



Our YPWF team have continued to offer opportunities for fun, connection, and support to the children of foster carers. We have a core group of attendees and have also welcomed new faces this year.

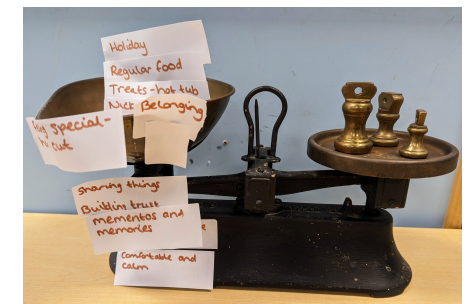
The feedback we have from young people is that they really enjoy these events & meeting others like them.

YPWF have also had the chance to be involved in the fostering recruitment film and social media posts.

YPWF runs bi-monthly weekend sessions. This year, this has included park games, indoor climbing, making pottery creations, and an exclusive adventure day in Lymley Wood, where we had a go at archery, assault courses, fire craft and tie-dye designing. We also ran an open drop-in 'pizza & games' evening in January, to give young people who hadn't come before the chance to attend with their parents to find out more about the group.

The group is facilitated by staff from the duty placements team, SSW team and recruitment team, meaning info and ideas about the group is shared across the service.

Alongside the fun stuff, we have continued our 'Support Sessions' which are learning & sharing events based around supporting young people with the emotional impact of being a fostering family. These trauma-informed sessions are based around what young people have told us they want to understand & talk more about. This year we've looked at stress responses, life scripts and attachment strategies.





# Foster Carer Training Stats 2023/24

- **270 mandatory course places** were accessed by foster carers this year (September 2023 - March 2024) compared to 248 the previous year.
- There have been **98 foster carers** on the in depth/specialist 'Deep Dive' courses, an increase of **188%** from last year.
- The number of e-learning courses accessed by foster carers this year is **651** which has **gone up 558%** from 99 last year following implementation of our new platform.
- The total number of places taken up by foster carers on all of our training courses this year was **1107** (April 2023 to March 2024) compared to 828 last year.
- The total **uptake of foster carer training has gone up 34%** from last year.

## Our Areas of Focus

Mandatory

Wellbeing

Bitesize

Deep Dive

# Looking to 2024/2025

To align with **Valuing Care**, our Training Brochure for 24/25 will include training around education and drugs and alcohol, to ensure all the domains can be supported if any gaps are identified.

**Mandatory training** - Maintaining the expectations on mandatory. Refresher training for experienced carers.

**Wellbeing** - More wellbeing events, wellbeing booklet, continuing the conversation around the impact of living with and caring for children who've experienced trauma.

**Bitesize** - Continue modular approach for Changing Chances, further responsive short webinars on specific behaviours to allow for more in-depth learning, Fostering Anytime resource bank to go live with the online Foster Carer Handbook, encouraging independent learning and use of the PDP. Development of reunification e-learning.

**Deep Dive** - More specialist/ in-depth training including continuing Being a Better Corporate Parent to our Black and Mixed Heritage Children and [Replenish](#) boxes, LGBTQ+, Foster Carer specific training on Life Story Work, Applying the Empowerment Approach (level 2), Education and caring for children with additional Learning Needs, Drugs and Alcohol.





# All in One Place...

- Learning Pool will come to carers from September 2024.
- As well as booking all the training through the platform, this will have direct links/boxes to:
  - The foster carer e-learning platform
  - The Foster Carer Handbook (which is being updated and will be hosted online). This will include blank forms and an Anytime Resource bank of useful videos, books, podcasts and articles.



# 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 2023/24.
- 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 our most vulnerable cared for young people, who's placements could be at risk of breakdown, without our support.

We do this out in the community, 'Knockhatch' being a firm favourite, or across our three sites; our caravans in Newhaven, Crowhurst and at Little Dunbar in Hailsham.

We continue to work closely with our Fostering Duty team, to support short-term emergency placements via our 'on call' duty system.

The service also continues to work closely with the Virtual School, supporting young people, both cared for or those on the edge of care, who are excluded or on a reduced timetable at school.

We have dedicated placement support workers who support young adults in the Through Care Team, who may live independently, residentially (in house) or with an external agency.



## Feedback from other professionals:

*"Thank you so much for this support, it is reassuring for me that J will be in your care during this tricky time." (Practice Manager)*

*"I would like to thank you for responding so swiftly to the initial referral and for the support you have given T since." (Social Worker)*

*"I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the support that PSS has given to the twins, it is most appreciated." (Social Worker)*

*"I really can't say enough positive things about all the PSW's - They really are stars who are shining bright at the moment 😊 Helped me beyond measure recently - Please feel free to embarrass them all with that plaudit should you see fit." (Social Worker)*

# Placement Support Service (continued)

134

Packages of  
Support were  
Delivered

- Reviews held - 64
- Set ups held - 22
- We continue to support our in-house Parent and Baby placements.
- We are currently supporting 19 young adults in the Through Care Team and oversee 3 properties.
- Virtual School support this year consisted of 255 sessions - supporting 17 young people.
- 33 packages ended, the majority of which moved on to a residential placement.

*"PSS is the highlight of the week for our young person."*

*"I would be lost without the support from PSS, thank you, you are all amazing."*

## Feedback from our evaluations:

*"There is something about a day out with a PSW that makes the young person feel secure and valued."*

*"I didn't ever realise how much I needed the time, until they went out with PSS, it's a really positive time for us and the boys love it."*

*"An invaluable service to support placements."*

# Children in Care Council

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

35 activities giving 71 young people the opportunity to speak out and speak up if they wanted too. Through this engagement 60 young people have asked for help with individual issues.

- **Digital Ambassadors**

CICC members have continued involvement with get digital, a digital care project run by East Sussex County Council to train, update and promote resources for keeping cared for children safe and resilient online. They have co delivered training to staff and foster carers and have worked alongside placement support and OBX to support digital inspired activities for young people in care.

- **National Participation**

9 CICC members along with 79 cared for young people from all over the UK, attended a day at the Coram Voice HQ in London to share their work and discuss national issues and campaigns.

Our young people raised concerns around the lack of support and understanding for transgender young people, and highlighted their on work supporting 'My things matter' a national campaign to ensure belongings are not lost or broken during placement moves.





# Children in Care Council (Continued)

- Partnership Working - Youth Cabinet

The CICC and the youth cabinet are establishing positive links and have worked together this year in recruitment panels and at the annual RPPR session to discuss how youth voice can influence decision making within the county council around spending and services.

- Volunteering

All CICC members have received certificates for the volunteering hours they have completed this year for their CICC role and work in their local communities.

The CICC were awarded second place in Coram Voice's national participation award for their work on promoting positive mental health, digital resilience and their contribution at Government meetings with APPG and DfE to help influence change at national levels.



# Priorities for 2024/25

Implementation of Mockingbird

To work in partnership with Through Care to develop placement pathways to independence via our 16+ provision

Continue development of a robust commissioning process to ensure that agencies are providing safe, appropriate care.

To prioritise carers well-being through training and support

Development of South East Regional Recruitment Hub

Focus on the stability and retention of our current fostering resource

The Placement Support service to continue its support to foster carers and those families on the edge of care.

To continue to support providers under the new regulatory framework (2023 Supported Accommodation Regulation)

Embedding learning and development from Valuing Care / Impower



# 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.

**Exemption** - Carers caring for more than three children for an agreed set period.

**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.

**16+ Supporting Independence Team (SIT)** - Placements for young people aged 16 and above who are in care transitioning to independence.

**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