



WEST MIDLANDS TEAM EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2026

WEST MIDLANDS  **ADCS NETWORK**

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WELCOME

Welcome to the West Midlands Team Excellence Awards 2026.

It is a privilege to bring together colleagues from across our region to celebrate the dedication, innovation and commitment that define children's services in the West Midlands.

Today's event is an opportunity to recognise teams that are making a genuine difference to the lives of children, young people and families. While their roles and responsibilities may differ, every team being celebrated today shares a common purpose: improving outcomes and creating opportunities for those we serve.

This year's nominations highlight the remarkable breadth of excellence across our region. We are proud to recognise colleagues from Children in Care, Staying Close, Dudley Virtual School, Children's Social Care Senior Leadership, the Social Work Academy, Early Years, Children's Residential Services, SEND Transformation, The Voice Project, SENMAS, Family Hubs, SEND Services, Voice, Influence & Change, Future Steps and Fostering Services.

Together, these teams represent the very best of children's services. They reflect the importance of listening to children and young people, supporting families, developing our workforce, championing inclusion, creating opportunity, and ensuring that every child has the chance to thrive.

As always, there is no overall winner. Every team recognised today has earned its place through exceptional commitment, partnership and impact. The Team Excellence Awards are about celebrating success, sharing learning and recognising the people behind the achievements.

I hope those joining us today leave feeling proud, not only of their own contribution and that of their colleagues, but also of the collective strength of children's services across the West Midlands. In challenging times, these teams remind us of what can be achieved when talented and committed people work together with a shared sense of purpose.

My sincere congratulations and thanks go to every nominated team, and to the leaders, managers and colleagues who support their work each day.

I hope you enjoy the event and the opportunity to celebrate everything that has been achieved over the past year.



James Thomas

Regional Chair,
West Midlands
ADCS Network & Chief
Executive, Birmingham
Children's Trust





Sandwell Quality Early Years and Childcare Team

Giving Every Child the Best Start

We support high-quality early education and childcare across Sandwell, helping children develop, thrive and become school-ready while ensuring families can access the childcare they need.

Our Achievements

Improved school readiness and early years outcomes.

Enhanced speech, language and communication through targeted support.

95% of childcare settings rated Good, Outstanding, Expected or Strong.

Expanded training and development for the Early Years workforce.

Increased childcare places, including funded provision from 9 months and 30-hour entitlements.

Strengthened partnerships with schools, Family Hubs, health services and childcare providers.

What Makes Us Different?

Our expert team brings together quality improvement, workforce development, strategic leadership and partnership working to improve outcomes for children and families across Sandwell.

Our Impact

For children

Better learning, development and school readiness.

Earlier identification and support for additional needs.

Access to high-quality early education.

For Families

Greater access to affordable childcare.

Improved support through joined-up services.

For Sandwell

A skilled and confident early years workforce.

Stronger childcare provision and local communities.

Delivery of statutory duties and the Best Start in Life vision.

Better outcomes. Stronger families. Thriving communities.





Dudley Virtual School

The virtual school champion the education of children in care (CiC), ensuring they receive the support they need to reach their full potential. Working strategically with schools, social care, carers and partner agencies to improve educational outcomes and life chances of CiC, previously looked after children and through its extended role, children with a social worker.

86.6% of Year 1 pupils achieved expected phonics

95 children accessing music tuition

47% SEND and 24.3% have an EHCP

Key achievements

The Virtual school team work tirelessly to make a difference to the lives of vulnerable children and young people across Dudley borough.

Significantly, this year the team has:

- Working to improve attendance
- Improved emotional wellbeing, confidence and resilience amongst young people
- Worked closely with schools, families, carers and other partners to identify barriers early
- Strengthened transition to further education, training, employment and adult hood
- Through strong partnership working reduced exclusions and improved inclusion
- Empowered professionals by providing training, advice and shared best practice
- Ensured the voice of the child always remains at the centre of planning and decision making
- Providing opportunities through Dudley Performing Arts for children and young people
- Established a football team, winning the first Inter-Virtual School Tournament against four other virtual schools.

Impact for children and young people in your area

- Improved educational attainment and progress
- Better school stability
- Stronger educational advocacy
- Increased aspirations and post-16 participation
- Enhanced wellbeing, confidence and personal development

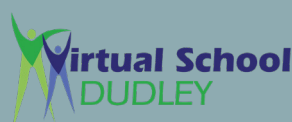
Impact on Dudley Council

- Better outcomes for children in care
- Reduced risk and earlier intervention
- Enhanced corporate parenting reputation
- Better partnership working across the system
- Improved value from Pupil Premium Plus investment

What sets them apart?

The special relationship with Dudley Performing Arts really sets them apart. A relationship developed over years of working together and one that has resulted in a Children in Care band called 'Reverb'. This unique relationship has given children new opportunities and the chance to develop their confidence, performing in local town halls throughout the year.

Children first and at the heart of all we do



Walsall's Education, Health and Care (EHC) team



A challenging landscape

Over the last four years, the Walsall Education, Health and Care (EHC) Team has transformed one of the council's most challenging statutory services whilst continuing to support around 4,800 children and young people with EHC plans (EHCP's). Faced with rapidly increasing demand, growing complexity and rising expectations, the team refused to accept that children and families should wait longer for the support they needed. Instead, they united behind a shared ambition: to build a service that delivers outstanding outcomes for children, young people and their families.

Our culture



Strong culture of teamwork, support and shared learning.



Collective ownership of challenges and successes.



Passionate about improving outcomes for children and families.

Our vision

Everything the team does is centred around children and families. Colleagues work with empathy, honesty and integrity, building trusted relationships with parents, carers and partners to secure the right support at the right time.

Our achievements

In 2022, just 8.5% of Education, Health and Care assessments were completed within the statutory 20-week timescale.

Fast forward to 2026, the service consistently delivers over 90% within timescale despite significant ongoing demand.

The team's annual review performance has improved significantly, the quality and consistency of decision-making has strengthened, and redesigned phase transfer arrangements have created smoother transitions for young people while contributing to a reduction in tribunal appeals.

These improvements have been achieved whilst maintaining high-quality statutory support for around 4,800 children and young people and responding to increasingly complex needs.

Inspection recognition

The team has transformed SEND services in Walsall, improving performance, shaping strategy and driving continuous improvement. Their impact was recognised in the 2025 Ofsted and CQC Area SEND inspection, which highlighted improved EHCP timeliness, stronger co-production and a solid foundation for further progress.

Going above and beyond

The Walsall EHC Team has demonstrated that even in one of the most demanding areas of local government, exceptional outcomes are possible when talented, compassionate and determined people work together with a shared purpose. Their work has transformed a service, strengthened confidence across the local area and improved the lives of thousands of children and families. They exemplify the very best of public service and are truly deserving of this recognition.



Walsall Council



Leadership impact on practice Inadequate to Outstanding

Inadequate to Good over all

Relentless Commitment • Outstanding Leadership • Better Outcomes for Children

From Inadequate to Good – A remarkable journey!

2022 Ofsted Rating:

Inadequate in all areas



2025 Ofsted Rating:

GOOD Overall Effectiveness



OUTSTANDING

Impact of Leaders on Practice

Achieved despite intense media scrutiny, workforce instability, the pandemic and major organisational change.



Herefordshire Council's Children's Social Care Senior Leadership Team. The team consist of: Sophie Roberts, Ruby Card, Tutsi Selvey, Deb Morgan, Vicky Leader, Dawn Knight, Stacie Edwards, Dorine Rai, Jess Davies, Andrea Busk and Nicky Turvey

Impact for children and families:

- ✓ Children supported to remain safely with their families
- ✓ Children protected when experiencing harm
- ✓ Young people cared for by high-quality foster carers when needed
- ✓ Families reunited where safe and appropriate
- ✓ Children seen, heard and involved in decisions affecting their lives

Ofsted recognised...

Leaders have firmly established a culture within the organisation to ensure that children are at the centre of service delivery

Children's voices are sought and heard

Leaders nurture and coach teams to deliver improvements and good practice, leading by example

Leading a workforce that are ambitious and have a child-focused approach

A comprehensive quality assurance framework

Social worker assessments are well considered and comprehensive

Appropriate thresholds for care and protection being applied effectively with **strong management oversight at all tiers**

A strong service to care leavers

Creative personal advisors who are committed to understanding young people's lives and helping them achieve their aspirations.

A clear and comprehensive '**Local Offer**'

What made the difference?

Child-Centered Leadership

Established a culture where children are at the heart of service delivery.

Ensured children's voices are heard and influence decisions.

Led with ambition, compassion and professionalism.

Workforce Transformation

Stabilised the workforce through successful recruitment and retention initiatives.

Increased workforce permanency from 24% (2023) to 81% (2026).

Nurtured, coached and developed teams to deliver high-quality practice.

Driving Improvement

Demonstrated relentless commitment through five years of challenge.

Built strong management oversight and quality assurance.

Delivered sustained improvement recognised by Ofsted.



Telford & Wrekin Council's **Best Start and Family Hubs team**

What is the core function of the team:

The team provides integrated support for children, young people and families from pregnancy through adolescence, bringing together local services to **deliver early help, whole-family support and targeted interventions that improve wellbeing and life chances.**

By responding proactively to local needs, support remains relevant, accessible and impactful.

The team's impact:

The team's impact extends far beyond individual families. Awareness and engagement have grown significantly, helping more families access support earlier. Children benefit from improved health, communication and school readiness, while targeted support helps reduce inequalities for fathers, younger parents, SEND families and seldom-heard communities.

Reach: 35,000 website visits.

Engagement: 3,888 Best Start contacts.

Direct impact: 693 families receiving support.

Community capacity and prevention: 415 individuals accessing community early help support in one quarter.

What sets this team apart is their unwavering belief in the power of participation. Through courageous conversations and inclusive leadership, **they create space for ideas to flourish and change to be driven by those who live it.**

What they have achieved over the last year:



Over the past year, the team has strengthened partnerships, embedded lived experience into service design and led the development of father-inclusive practice through the Fathers' Forum, Fatherhood Champion training, Fathers' conference and Borough-wide engagement.

The team has expanded specialist SEND, perinatal and early years support, improving outcomes for children and increasing parental confidence. Through commissioned best start services for parents of SEND and disabled children, including neonatal support, more families are accessing the right help at the right time, supporting children's development and giving

families the support they need to thrive.

A significant development has been the transformation of the Family Support Service into a Youth and Community Practitioner Team, delivering support through 15 local access drop-ins, evening telephone support and community-based groups, ensuring families can access help closer to home.

One particularly powerful example highlights the impact of Family Hubs' joined-up approach. After a family arrived in Telford facing significant hardship, Family Hubs coordinated immediate support, including food, household essentials, welfare advice and community connections. Through a compassionate multi-agency response, a situation of crisis and potential homelessness was transformed into one of stability, hope and belonging.

Family Hubs are shaped by the voices of families they support. Through the Dandelion Group, parents with lived experience influence service design and delivery, while partnerships with health services and early years providers continue to strengthen support for children and families.

One USP that sets them out from the crowd:

The team brings partners, families and communities together to create **meaningful and lasting change.** Through strong relationships, co-production and community-based support, it delivers a joined-up approach that empowers families to overcome challenges, build resilience and thrive.



Innovative scheme already making a difference



Coventry's Staying Close Team makes a big difference to many young lives. Through bringing together colleagues from Children's Homes, the House Project, Lifelong Links, Citizen Housing and Care Leavers, it has built a network of support to help young people move into adulthood – endeavouring to make sure a care leaver never feels alone.

Creating a sense of empowerment

Whether it's support with employment, housing, managing family difficulties, or even sorting a car breakdown, young people know carers are there to support them.

The House Project has supported over 90 young people to transition to their own tenancies enabling them to create their own home.

Through Lifelong Links, young people have reported repaired relationships, increased knowledge of family and a stronger sense of identity.

What the team has achieved over the last year

Staying Close has helped young people maintain links with people that are important to them, access education, employment and training, sustain tenancies, build independence skills and improve emotional wellbeing. The team is part of a Children's Services' offer rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted.

In the past year the team has supported 35 care-experienced young people, including helping some through mental health challenges and two becoming parents.

What sets us apart

The Staying Close carers network is always there when needed. Leaving care is a major life transition, and the 24/7 offer delivered by known and trusted adults provides a distinctive, preventative model that gives practical help, emotional reassurance, advocacy, crisis support – and knowledge that there are always people they trust who can support them.

Impact on Coventry City Council

Staying Close has strengthened our Care Leaver Offer and our role as Corporate Parents – but it's done so much more. By helping young people with education, employment, and housing, it is helping the Council deliver its key priorities of improving outcomes and economic prosperity, and tackling inequalities within local communities. It is putting Coventry City Council on the map as a partner, enabler and leader of best outcomes – and above all, it's giving care and support to young people when they need it most.



Warwickshire County Council - Children & Families Service

Voice, Influence and Change Team

Who We Are and What We Do

The Voice, Influence and Change Team (VIC) creates trusted and accessible opportunities for children, young people, parents and carers to shape the services and decisions affecting their lives. Through established forums, coproduction, creative engagement and direct involvement in governance, quality assurance, commissioning and recruitment, those with lived experience influence change.



What Sets Us Apart

VIC holds all children and young people's voices together in one place from across Warwickshire to enable strategic influence, ensuring their lived experience is better understood through developing trusted relationships. VIC's integration across the system enables meaningful collaboration and shared decision making with children and young people, parents and carers. VIC fosters cross-forum relationships to enable joint work, recognising the impact of intersectionality.

VIC ensures that young people have an influence strategically, but also opportunities to grow individually and take the lead as their confidence grows. The Team value lived experience and have a long history of recruiting apprentices and staff with lived experience.

Influence of Children and Young People

- Young people have direct influence over decisions, rather than being asked for feedback after decisions have been made.
- Young people see their recommendations reflected in EHCPs, hospital environments, commissioning plans, recruitment and professional learning.
- Brothers and sisters living apart maintain relationships and create shared memories that support their identity and longer-term family connections.
- Young people, parents and carers' expertise informs service design, strategy, learning & development of family-led practice.
- Forums, events, apprenticeships and decision-making roles build confidence, skills, connections and further opportunities.

What We Are Proud Of



Fun Activities with our Children that Build Strong Relationships: Trips throughout the year to the beach, Peppa Pig World, All Things Wild, Flip Out and more! These enable us to really get to know our children and understand their wishes and feelings.



Wider strategic reach and influence: Young people contributed to CAMHS commissioning, senior recruitment and strategic boards. Young People support training directly and through resources like 'Wrong Size Fits All' film, which has reached almost 27,000 views.



Young Inspectors Shaping Services: Young people developed the framework, training and questions used to review children's homes, supported accommodation and hospital settings. Inspections have triggered interest and invitations from others.



Shaping the child's story through SEND quality assurance: Young people reviewed Education, Health and Care Plans and challenged how their stories are introduced, so the child's identity, strengths and aspirations are now presented before describing needs or past difficulties.



Connecting Brothers and Sisters: VIC delivered its 5th annual day and 4th residential for siblings who live apart. The project began because children in care said they didn't see their siblings enough. It creates shared meals, activities and ordinary family experiences that help maintain what should be their most long-lasting relationships.



Making tools/resources that Young People wished they'd had: Young people co-produced guidance for gathering children's views and the TTRIM Plan, covering triggers, transitions, regulation, interests and motivations. These tools give young people more ownership of how information about them is gathered and shared.



"Just like to say a big thank you for the Peppa Pig trip and looking after L. She loved the whole experience and asked if she's still with us next year can she go again? Thanks again for all you do."

Foster Carer

"Forums give us the opportunity to talk about things that are important to us... it's given us a place we are valued, and where we really have a voice."

Forum Member

Influence and Change In Warwickshire

VIC has built a participation structure that connects lived experience with governance, quality assurance and improvement. Its work strengthens accountability, supports better-informed decisions and helps Warwickshire meet its commitment to being child friendly. The team's approach has received regional and national recognition, with other local authorities looking to replicate the learning from the VIC Team. Three Ofsted inspections recognise the strength of participation in Warwickshire. Most importantly young people see the difference they are making.

"IMPACT was mentioned as an excellent example of great practice, and another local authority was looking to replicate it."

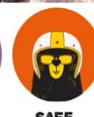
Department for Education Adviser



We want all children in Warwickshire to be...



HEARD



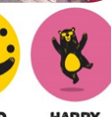
SAFE



HEALTHY



SKILLED



HAPPY

FUTURE STEPS

Team Excellence Awards 2026

A pioneering, trauma-informed service, which went live in 2023, helping parents create lasting change and break the cycle of children entering care. Future Steps works with birth parents after care proceedings conclude through voluntary, relationship-based support built on trust, dignity and hope.

Impact at a glance



Why future steps is different

A specialist multi-disciplinary team bringing together expertise within one offer.

- ✓ Mentoring
- ✓ Sexual Health Support
- ✓ Substance Misuse Recovery
- ✓ Clinical & Therapeutic Support
- ✓ Housing & Financial Advice
- ✓ Education, Employment & Training
- ✓ Life Skills & Family Support

Real change for parents

HEALTH & WELLBEING

- No repeat pregnancies reported
- 92% using regular contraception
- 13 adults engaged with therapy
- 11 adults supported to access health appointments

RECOVERY, SAFETY & STABILITY

- 5 adults no longer using substances
- 6 adults reduces substance use
- 9 adults secured suitable accommodation
- 3 adults no longer at risk of eviction

INDEPENDENCE, CONFIDENCE & HOPE

- 7 adults entered training
- 3 adults volunteering
- 1 adult gained employment
- 14 adults developed practical life skills
- Parents reported feeling less isolated more confident and better connected to services

Changing lives through hope, trust, persistence and partnership.

Parent voice



Made me feel less lonely



I have someone on my side who doesn't judge me



Future Steps has helped me become a better person

TEAM EXCELLENCE

- Multi-agency Innovation – keyworker mentors, sexual health & substance misuse practitioners, specialist therapist.
- Parent lead, collaboratively designed, high-intensity support over a sustained period of time.
- Engagement based on voluntary consent based on trust and choice
- Persistent, non-judgement approach that supports parental stability, empowerment and recovery.

COUNCIL IMPACT & COST AVOIDANCE

- 24% of local proceedings involved repeat removals, showing the scale of the challenge
- Average projected council cost: £84,184 for each child in care, excluding adoption costs
- 2026/27 team cost: £366,615, excluding psychologist post.
- Preventing around 5 children entering care each year would make the team cost-effective.
- Potential additional expenditure avoided is modelled at £757.657 to £3.11m

Future steps converts compassion into measurable change:
Healthier parents | Safer futures for children | Reduced long-term demand on the council

Wolverhampton.gov.uk

CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL



Team Excellence Awards 2026

Birmingham Children's Trust - Children in Care (CiC) Team

Core Function

Our Children in Care service works with children in our care, including undertaking care proceedings and developing care and pathway plans to give children and young people stability whilst maintaining links with family where possible.



What we've achieved over the last year



- Outcomes for children and young people have remained positive, children continue to live in stable homes, and where possible this is within their family network.
- Personal advisors are introduced to young people as they become eligible for a care leaver service. This has improved the quality of pathway planning with over 98% of young people living in suitable accommodation.
- Our newly created 'Future Navigators' are ensuring that our young people remain in EET, creating opportunities for young people to access bespoke training courses and apprentice opportunities within the Trust, Birmingham City Council, as well as with partners.
- Established a 'grow your own' initiative. 33 posts were ringfenced to establish three ASYE teams. The service were amazing in supporting this initiative as it meant that for a period all other teams would have had an increased workload. Feedback from staff, children, and families has been extremely positive.
- The service has established a 'Permanence Hub'. This has established a range of services greater scrutiny of plans for young people, and has enabled a significant number of discharges to be progressed.

Why do we stand out from the crowd?

The service has a stable and committed workforce which is creative and forward thinking. The experience of children and young people is at the centre of all we do. The service has a number of roles dedicated to supporting both social workers and young people to achieve. We celebrate the success of our young people and our staff.



What has been the impact for children and young people in the area?



Children and young people are experiencing positive outcomes, in line with their plans. We are ensuring that more children are living within their family networks, and where possible children are discharged from care in a timely manner in line with their care plan. For those young people who remain in our care most experience stable supportive homes and positive pathway planning. The Lifelong Links service has ensured that young people leave care with an established network of support. The incentives around workforce have ensured that young people have established relationships with their social worker.

What has been the impact for your Trust?

Through our CiC transformation programme, we have focused on progressing young people's plans, including a focus on moving children from residential care to foster care, or reunification with their birth family. The programme has enabled a significant number of children and young people to achieve family-based care. This was the primary aim of the programme, however a secondary benefit is the cost savings this has achieved.



CONNECTIONS COUNT

Solihull Council's SEND Transformation Team exemplifies collaborative leadership, innovation and excellence in public service.



Their work is creating lasting, system-wide change that will improve the lives of children, young people and families for years to come, making them exceptionally worthy recipients of an ADCS Team Excellence Award.

Operating within an exceptionally challenging national context, the team has successfully developed and mobilised **Solihull's Local Area SEND Reform Plan** at pace, bringing together partners from across education, health, social care, schools, early years, post-16 providers, parent carers and children and young people around a single shared vision.



Placing co-production with parent carers and young people at the heart of their work, they have ensured families helped shape every stage of the SEND Reform Plan.

Their work will strengthen mainstream inclusion, expand specialist provision, improve workforce capability and introduce innovative locality-based support, creating lasting improvements for children and young people with **SEND**.

The **SEND Transformation Team** has been exceptional in delivering one of the most ambitious programmes of change within our organisation whilst balancing national reform requirements with local priorities, all whilst maintaining absolute clarity of purpose.

Throughout this work, the team has shown extraordinary resilience, professionalism and commitment.

They have navigated complexity with confidence, maintained momentum under significant pressure and consistently focused on what will make the greatest difference for children young people.



**Working
for Children
and Families
in Solihull**



Sandwell
Children's Trust



SOCIAL WORK ACADEMY

Supporting social workers, practitioners and students to learn, develop, and thrive at every stage of their career.

Our Social Work Academy has been highly successful in **growing our own social workers**. We welcome students from a variety of qualifying programmes to create a diverse student cohort and workforce. As students progress into the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE), they are guided, supported and developed throughout their first year of practice.

The Academy's impact is reflected in **good quality practice experienced by children and families**. By developing skilled, reflective, ST*R Model practitioners, we enable earlier support, stronger relationships and more effective interventions that **improve outcomes and life experiences for children**.

Through ongoing practice learning, professional development and career progression opportunities, our social workers continue to grow and develop, with many going on to become senior social workers, team managers and the senior **leaders of the future**.

Practice Development Training and Learning

Evidence-informed learning opportunities are shaped by research, guidance, workforce feedback and local priorities to support high-quality practice.

Embedding Reflective Spaces

Reflective sessions, forums, supervision and discussion groups help practitioners develop critical thinking, professional curiosity and reflective practice.



Accessible Practice Resources and Support

Our Good Practice Hub provides guidance, tools, templates and examples to support consistent, high-quality practice across the organisation.

"I'm really proud of what I've achieved as a social work apprentice and excited to take the next step into social work and the ASYE programme."



"The ASYE Programme has been instrumental in helping me grow both professionally and personally as a newly qualified social worker."



"Progressing to Senior Social Worker reflects earning trust in my practice and having the confidence to take on greater responsibility."



"The Progress to Leadership course broadened my organisational and strategic thinking, helping me develop as a future leader."



ST*R Partnership Practice Model

Provides a consistent, shared approach to working with children, young people and families.



Strengths Based



Trauma Informed



Relationship Based



Children's Homes Team

Putting Love back in the system

Creating safe, nurturing homes where children are seen, heard and helped to thrive.

A whole-service Children's home team recognised for child-centred care, consistent safeguarding practice and the everyday achievements for children living in our Shropshire homes.

Core Function of the Team

Shropshire's children's homes provide safe, nurturing, individualised child centred care in beautiful homes for children that are unable to live with their families. The team offers trusting relationships developed through therapeutic support and parenting approaches that provide consistency, stability, routines and safe care, enabling children to be themselves, find their voice, feel loved and cared for and provide them with hope and ambitions for the future. Children achieve outcomes that are important to them and identify their individuality, their success and their aspirations. .

What sets us apart

We provide more than a placement, we provide them with a home that has a sense of family and trusted relationships through therapeutic care, relational trauma informed interactions that enable children to settle, have their needs met, and enable them to have ordinary childhood experiences through education, hobbies, independence, family time, community activity and charity work. Everyone in the team has a role in helping children feel safe, heard, valued and proud.

What we have achieved over the last year

- Kept children's voice central in day-to-day care, listened to how children want to prepare to move to the homes, how they want to live in them and what they want for the future.
- Strengthened consistent care, safeguarding and reflective practice across Shropshire children's homes.
- Worked with families and the children to develop their family relationships and spend quality time together.
- Celebrated children's personal milestones, confidence and positive community contributions.
- Encouraged children to give back, including BB's charity bake sale, showing kindness and community spirit.

Top 3 Achievements

1. Successful Family Reunification

RJ safely returned home after focused, child-centered work with family and professionals

2. Positive Community Impact

BB's Charity bake sale built confidence, pride and community spirit while helping others.

3. Ofsted Recognition

All homes have retained Outstanding or Good Ofsted ratings.

Young Person Feedback

"Since moving into the home, I've felt listened to and supported. Carers have helped me believe in myself, try new things and achieve things I never thought I could. They don't just look after me, they genuinely care about what happens to me and my future."

Impact on Children and Young People

- Children are supported by carers who know them well, remain alongside them during difficult periods and help them feel safe, heard and cared for carers remain supporting children once they move on for as long as the child needs/wants that support.
- Children build confidence through education, activities, family time, independence skills and new experiences.
- Children are recognised for positive contributions, helping develop pride, identity and self-worth



WORCESTERSHIRE FOSTERING SERVICE

The Worcestershire Fostering Service is responsible for the recruitment, assessment, training and retention of foster carers. The team provides ongoing support and development opportunities to ensure carers can offer safe, stable and nurturing homes for Worcestershire's children and young people.

Key achievements

The Recruitment and Retention Team consistently delivers innovative, **high-impact activities with minimal cost to the Council**. In response to increasing budget pressures, the team has built strong partnerships with local organisations, creating opportunities through collaboration and mutual benefit.

Examples include:

- Sharing event spaces with the Regional Adoption Agency to promote Foster to Adopt.
- Volunteering at community activity days to gain free opportunities to promote fostering.
- Working with the Council's Commercial Team to secure foster carer gift hampers through social value contributions from commissioned partners.

The team has also secured **additional benefits for foster carers and young people**, including free leisure memberships, no-cost venues for family activities, and arts-based projects. In addition, the team has developed the Valuing Care approach with our Specialist Fostering scheme to support 9 children out of residential care and into foster families.

Impact for children and young people

A key priority for the local authority is increasing the number of local foster carers so that more children and young people can remain close to their families, schools, friends and communities.

The growth in local fostering capacity is **helping more children stay in familiar surroundings**, providing greater stability at a time of significant change. Through partnerships with local organisations, the team has also created opportunities for young people to participate in activities such as arts projects, exhibitions and community events. These experiences help build confidence, develop new skills and strengthen feelings of belonging and achievement.

Children involved in the Valuing Care programme have shown improved school attendance, longer periods of emotional regulation, stronger sense of identity and belonging and **children are reporting feeling happy and settled**.

Impact for the Council

The number of approved mainstream **foster carers increased from five in 2024/25 to 27 in 2025/26**, with seven carers transferring from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs).

This, alongside the Valuing Care programme, has reduced reliance on higher-cost placements, delivering substantial financial benefits for the Council while ensuring more Worcestershire children can remain with local foster carers.

SENMAS

Stoke-on-Trent City Council's SENMAS team is nominated for Education Team of the Year for delivering high quality statutory assessment services, co-ordinating complex multi-agency support and improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND.



WHO WE ARE

SENMAS is Stoke-on-Trent City Council's Special Educational Needs Monitoring and Assessment Service.



STATUTORY ASSESSMENTS

Managing EHC needs assessments and Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).



MULTI-AGENCY WORKING

Coordinating education, health and care professionals to support effective decision-making.



PROVISION & PLACEMENTS

Helping children and young people access the right support in the most appropriate setting.



AWARD NOMINEE

Recognised for responding to unprecedented demand while improving quality, timeliness and outcomes.

62%

issued within 20 weeks

11%

increase in EHCP assessment requests

3,800+

EHCP caseload

Backlog reduced

Only a handful of cases beyond 30 weeks

Evidence-based decision-making

Consistent placement decisions

AI-enabled triage

Quality assurance

Smarter workflows

Committed to a mainstream-first approach, SENMAS has helped more children and young people thrive in their communities and attend school alongside their peers. Through evidence-based, child-centred decision-making and collaborative problem-solving, the team has reduced reliance on specialist and independent placements while improving outcomes, belonging and long-term life chances.

SENMAS has strengthened both SEND provision and financial sustainability by increasing confidence in mainstream inclusion and improving consistency in decision-making, banding and resource allocation. This has reduced reliance on high-cost independent placements, delivering approximately £4.2m in in-year cost avoidance and savings while improving High Needs Block forecasting.



City of
Stoke-on-Trent

The Voice Project

Staffordshire County Council

The Voice Project is dedicated to hearing the voices of children, young people, parents and carers who receive children's social care and SEND services.

Impact of the Voice Project

We regularly co-produce important pieces of work, making sure people with lived experience of our services have their voices heard when they're being developed and improved.

We are committed to making sure people are given the chance to have their say, including running a Children in Care Council, eight forums a month for young people, and termly SEND for our Voices sessions. We are now expanding to create networks of parents who have experience of our services, so we can strengthen feedback and co-produce new support.



Care leaver
local offer
co-produced



New crisis service developed
for young people experiencing
acute mental health difficulties



SEND
strategy
co-produced

What our young people say

"I have someone to
talk to and something
to look forward to."

"I like meeting
people and making
new friends."

"I like coming to the
Voice Project because
they help me build
my confidence."

What our parents and carers say

"It's a really rewarding
experience for our young
people to go to the forums.
They gain confidence and
self-esteem, and they feel
that their opinions and
voices are heard."

"M's confidence and
communication skills have
improved. She enjoys taking
part in discussions at the group
and eating together at the end
of the session helps with her
social skills."

"My young person respects
and accepts others' opinions
during debates. He has
become more sociable and
he doesn't back away from
making conversation with
his peers."



2025 WINNERS





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