



# Community Planning Aberdeen

<b>Progress Report</b>	Project End 6.2: increase to 43%, by 2023, the proportion of children and young people who are supported to live in kinship care or are looked after at home; and increase by 20% the number of children and young people remaining in a placement, looked after at home/kinship, between 16-18 years old by 2023
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<b>Date of Report</b>	01/03/2023
<b>Governance Group</b>	CPA Board – 19 April 2023

<b>Purpose of the Report</b>
<p>This report presents the results of the LOIP Improvement Aim 6.2 which sought to increase to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) 43%, by 2023, the proportion of children and young people who are supported to live in kinship care or are looked after at home; and</li> <li>(2) Increase by 20% the number of children and young people remaining in a placement, looked after at home/kinship, between 16-18 years old by 2023 and seeks approval to end the project.</li> </ul>

<b>Summary of Key Information</b>
<p><b>1 BACKGROUND</b></p> <p>1.1. This project is important as it aims to increase the number of children and young people who are supported to live in kinship care or be looked after at home with their parents. Both Aim statements, are important because, it is mandated that we ensure that families remain together- where it is safe to do so. This improvement charter is also aligned with the direction of travel set out in the recommendations and final report of the independent care Review (2020). The Promise explicitly states that: <i>“Where children are safe in their families and feel loved they must stay – and families must be given support together to nurture that love and overcome the difficulties which get in the way”</i></p> <p>1.2. An important consideration, for Aberdeen City in considering why this charter is important emerges when we explore our ‘Balance of Care’ - or more plainly, where children who are “Looked-After” live and who they live with. It was recognised that Aberdeen City has a higher percentage of children and young people placed in a fostering setting compared to the national position. At the</p>

start of the improvement project (April 2019) 14.7 % of children were looked after at home, 19.1 % lived in kinship care and 52 % were accommodated in foster placements. The remaining 15.2 % were with other placement types such as adoption and residential/group living. Given the complex needs of this group of children, it was recognised that reducing the number of children in foster placement to align with the national average will take a number of years, however it was recognised that there was an opportunity to undertake improvement work in relation to address the balance of care and focusing in family.

## **2 IMPROVEMENT PROJECT AIM**

- 2.1 Against this background, the CPA Board approved the refreshed [project charter](#) which aimed to: increase to 43%, by 2023, the proportion of children and young people who are supported to live in kinship care or are looked after at home; and increase by 20% the number of children and young people remaining in a placement, looked after at home/kinship, between 16-18 years old by 2023.
- 2.2 We focused our activity on increasing the number of children living in kinship placements, including the specific requirements for 16-18 year olds as per the focus of the second aim, given that this area is prioritised in The Promise and Plan 2021- 24 and critical to our balance of care position. We were less confident about commencing change ideas to increase the number of young people looked after at home as this runs contrary to the intention of policy and legislation in terms of the no order principle/ minimal intervention. Furthermore, Scottish Government statistics showed that there had been a downward trend in number of children looked after at home for some years.
- 2.3 At the outset, it was acknowledged that baseline data was not available on the number of 16–18-year-olds remaining in a looked after placement due to there not being a standardised recording systems across the service and the Dynamics 365 build reducing IT support to produce this data set. As such a priority for the team was establishing the data set and designing the improvements for this aspect. This data set was received in August 2022 and analysed.

## **3 WHAT CHANGES DID WE MAKE?**

- 3.1 During the project we focused on testing improvements to strengthen the support offer to kinship placements through the provision of enhanced packages of support to children when placements were identified as vulnerable, and young people were facing points of transition. This was with the view to bolster the longevity and stability of kin placements. Enhanced packages varied depending on the needs of the child and young person and the circumstances of the kinship placement.
- 3.2 To support this, the Family Time Hub (FTH) also took on responsibility for supporting supervised contact arrangements and carers were provided with practical and emotional support from the Family Network Team as and when it was required. Feedback from kinship carers reflected positively on this support and helped them to develop a clear understanding of the needs of the child in

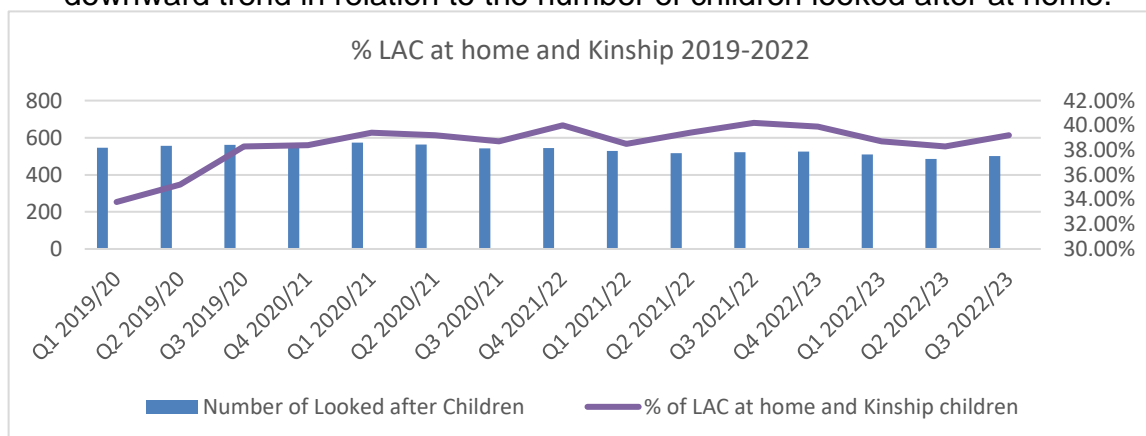
their care and the impact of early life events/trauma on their needs and behaviours. This learning will directly feed into how we evolve the role and capacity of the kinship team to support kinship carers going forward.

3.3 We also tested a change idea that by developing the professional relationships between CSW, SCRA and CHS this would enhance decision making in relation to children and young people. A number of shared learning events occurred, attended by all three agencies to support an understanding of childhood trauma. Feedback from these has supported a continuing and open dialogue across agencies and has supported professional contributions to the Children’s Hearing Review that will conclude in April 2023.

#### 4 HAVE OUR CHANGES RESULTED IN IMPROVEMENT?

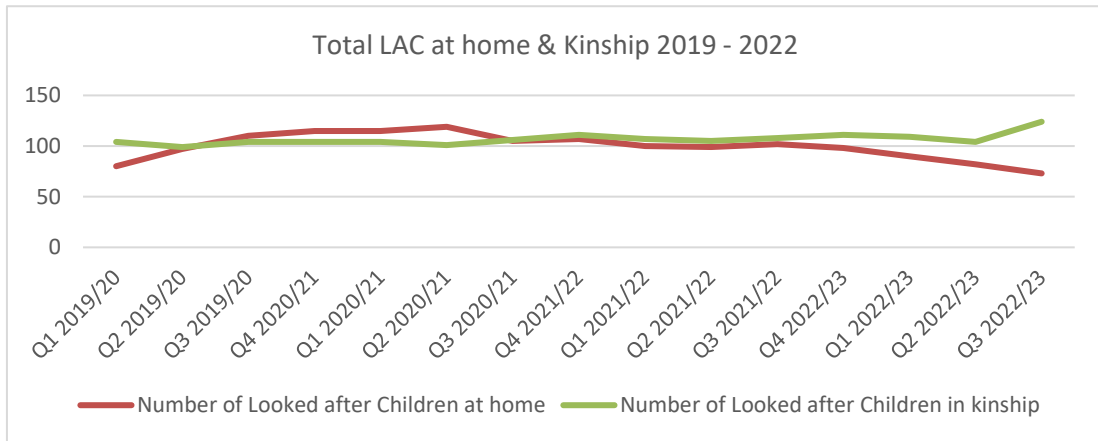
4.1 We measured outcome data quarterly in relation to the number of children living in kinship placements and young people looked after at home during the reporting period. The data shows that there has been a 5.4 % increase in the number of children living in kinship placements and looked after at home (33.8% Q1 2019) to 39.2% Q3 2022).

4.2 We are however still unlikely to achieve this aim and while the improvement is positive, the data is distorted when considered collectively, as it masks the downward trend in relation to the number of children looked after at home.

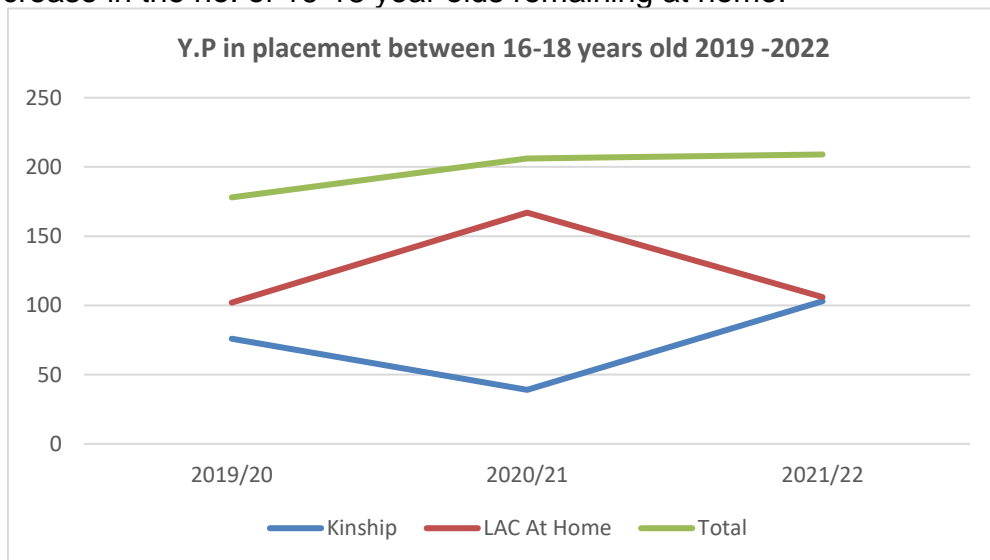


4.3 Scrutiny of Scottish Government Looked After returns demonstrates that the proportion of children looked after at home has reduced significantly in the past decade. For example, in 2010 looked after children at home made up 39% of the looked after population, this fell to 25% in 2020 and 22% in 2021.

4.4 The data shows that Aberdeen City has mirrored this lineal trend. From January to September 2022 there has been a 2.68% reduction in children looked after at home in Aberdeen. The % of looked after children at home and in kinship care was 39.2% at the end of Quarter 3 in 2022. If looked after children at home had remained static, the overall % would be 42.6% and we could say with some confidence that the data indicates we would have met the overall aim. This is not likely due to the pattern sequence showing a downward trend locally and nationally in relation to looked after children at home and this has meant that any gains made in relation to increasing kinship care has been offset.



4.5 Similarly, in relation to the second aim focusing on 16-18 year olds, there has been a 17% increase in the total no. of 16-18 remaining in placement since 2019/20, from 178 (2019/20) to 209 (2021/22). As shown in the chart below the total increase has been sustained since 2020/21, however as described above in terms of overall looked after children there has also been a substantial decrease in the no. of 16-18 year olds remaining at home.



4.6 The reduction in children looked after at home both locally and nationally, correlates with the publication of The Promise and Plan 21-24 which required agencies to re-think how they provide preventative intensive family support that enables children to remain within their family. The Promise re-emphasised that statutory intervention into the lives of children and families should only be considered where the level of risk requires such. This accords with the “minimum intervention” and “no order principle” of the 1995 Children (Scotland) Act. These emphasise children should not be made subject to an order unless the risks clearly determine such is in their best interests.

4.7 Both aims of this project run contrary to this policy and legislative intention – seeking an increase to the proportion of children and young people who are supported to live in kinship care or are looked after at home.

4.8 Over recent years the number of looked after children in Aberdeen City has fallen by circa 11.5%. while the overall demand on Children’s SW has reduced by circa 5.5%. In effect Aberdeen City is supporting more children and young people, with significant risk factors in their family circumstances, to continue to live within their family with an appropriate multi-agency support plan in place without the need for a compulsory order.

	Average No. of Cases held by CSW	Average No. of LAC	Average No. of cases without a compulsory order
Year 2019/20	1949	559	1390 (71.3%)
Year 2020/21	1834	551	1284 (70%)
Year 2021/22	1773	520	1253 (70.7%)
Year 2022/23*	1844	492	1353 (73%)

\*- Not full year data

4.9 The changes we tested, have been seen to have a positive impact. Feedback from the enhanced packages of support provided to kinship placements, identified as vulnerable, clearly demonstrate positive impact. Prior to this support the likelihood of these placement breaking down and the child/young person needing to live out with their family were significant. The cost to the child, the family and the public purse of such an outcome would also have been significant.

4.10 Feedback from families/kinship carers includes:  
***“We became carers for our granddaughter in 2021. Dealing with a teenager with various behaviour issues was to say the least a difficult task for two grandparents in their 60’s. Without the help of the family network team this may have been beyond us. We found the group & individual meetings a great help not only for the child but for us as carers. The importance of these meetings cannot be understated. On more than one occasion they were the only thing that kept the relationship between us and our granddaughter in place.”***

4.11 Feedback from CHS members – ***“Kinship carer has engaged really well with the family network team to support child M with her challenging behaviour. The progress being made by child M and her sister is superb”***  
 Whilst Child F wrote a thank you note to her worker simply noting ***“Thank you for helping me with my problems”***.

4.12 The role of the Family Time Hub (FTH) has also been significant. It has seen a supervised contact arrangements overseen by the FTH. These arrangements have provided kinship carers with practical and emotional support. Feedback

from kinship carers reflects positively on this support which has provided and helped them to develop a clear understanding of the needs of the child in their care and the impact of early life events/trauma on their needs and behaviours.

4.13 The changes tested with SCRA & CHS has led a continuing and open dialogue across agencies with regular connecting meetings. This dialogue has also supported professional contributions to the Children's Hearing Review that is due to conclude in April 2023.

4.14 It is acknowledged that Aberdeen City has a higher % of children and young people placed within a fostering setting compared to the national position. Since April 2020 the number of children living in foster care has however reduced by circa 8%. It is recognised, given the needs of this group of children, that reducing this number to align with the national average will take a number of years. It will therefore be important that we continue to develop our Teir 2 Family Support Model to mitigate the need for children, who don't otherwise require it from entering into the social work system. Simultaneously we need to continue with our efforts to enhance our local fostering capacity to better meet the needs of those children who cannot remain within their family. Both these improvements are captured within the CS Plan 2023-26 within the revised Children's Services Plan 2023.

## **5 HOW WILL WE SUSTAIN THESE IMPROVEMENTS?**

5.1 The number of children living in kinship placements has increased during the reporting period and changes that have been tested to date are now embedded within our practice model as business as usual. The Promise Plan 2021-24 sets out a clear strategic direction in relation to the utilisation of family support models to keep children with their families. The changes embedded with be taken forward as part of our emerging Family Support Model – offering earlier and preventative support/intervention with a particular focus on kinship carers and preventing children and young people being placed out with their family. The changes will be reviewed on an ongoing basis, with feedback sought from our children and young people and their carers to ensure that we are meeting their needs and adapting support as required.

5.2 Our refreshed Children's Services Plan recognises the continuing priority on our collective need to reduce the number of looked after children and simultaneously rebalancing our care profile. SO 6 makes clear this continuing priority.

## **6 HOW WILL WE MONITOR THESE IMPROVEMENTS?**

6.1 Children's Social Work collates data monthly in relation to the number of children living in kinship placements, looked after at home and there are now systems in place to collate and analyse the number of young people in the age range 16-18 remaining in looked after placements. The Scottish Government and SCRA publish this data annually. Kinship data will continue to be reported the Council's Education & Children's Services Committee and Community Planning Aberdeen Board via the reporting in relation to the Children's Services

Plan and Corporate Parenting Plan including progress in delivering The Promise.

## **7 OPPORTUNITIES FOR SCALE UP AND SPREAD**

7.1 As above, the changes that have been made are now embedded into practice and the publication of The Promise and Plan 21-24 requires all agencies to re-think how they provide preventative support that enables children to remain within their family network. The changes will be spread through the Family Support Model and the development of a Bairns Hoose.

### **Recommendations for Action**

It is recommended that the CPA Board:

- i) Agree that testing concluded that this Improvement Project comes to an end on the basis that it is recognised that whilst the overall aims have not been achieved positive outcomes have been and that the overall intention of both aims have not been achieved due to the reasons set out above and that both run contrary to The Promise and the legislative principles in respect of looked after children; and
- ii) Note that key aims for Children's Social Work within the revised Children's Service Plan are to (1) Reduce by 5% the number of children entering the care system by 2024 and (2) reduce the number of children placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) out with the city, and therefore the data would be monitored on an ongoing basis the Corporate Parenting Outcome Group and the Children's Services Board and reported on an annual basis to the CPA Board.

### **Opportunities and Risks**

Opportunities: -

- There is an opportunity to link the needs of children living in kinship placements with the work that is being undertaken in relation to the family support model.
- To ensure the Voice of children, young people and kinship carers continue to inform our support offer.
- To align multi-agency processes to the change anticipated as a result of the Children's Hearing Review.
- Better communication in partnership working
- Learning opportunities across multiagency

Risks: -

- Any continuing risks are mitigated by the continuing lens via the Children's Services Plan of the need to reduce the number of looked after children placed out with their family.

### **Consultation**

Consultation with the Graeme Simpson, Chair of the Corporate Parenting Outcome Improvement Group and other key members.

CS Board CPA Management Group
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<b>Background Papers</b>
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The following papers were used in the preparation of this report.
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