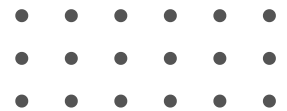
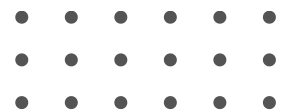


# LIFELONG LINKS IMPACT REPORT

**2024-25**



[WWW.FRG.ORG.UK/LIFELONGLINKS](http://WWW.FRG.ORG.UK/LIFELONGLINKS)



## The challenge

Most of us have somebody we can turn to for practical and emotional support – family, friends, neighbours.

For children in care and those leaving care, these important relationships are often broken when they enter the care system. Many are separated from their brothers and sisters, have to change school, or move far away from family and friends.

Children and young people are left isolated and alone. A lack of positive relationships increases the likelihood that they experience difficulties in life – such as poor mental health, a tougher time at school, unemployment and homelessness.

**37%**

of children in care who have siblings are separated from them (Children's Commissioner for England)

**18 miles**

The average distance a child in care in England is living away from their family and friends (#GoneTooFar Become)

**25%**

of homeless people are care experienced (Crisis)

**10x**

more likely that care leavers are not in education, employment or training at 21, compared to peers (The Rees Centre)

## The solution



An innovative approach developed by Family Rights Group in collaboration with children in care, care experienced young people, foster carers and practitioners.



### Improved mental health and wellbeing

A significant improvement in the mental health and well-being of young people who participated in Lifelong Links, as measured in Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQ scores).



### Improved sense of identity

78% of children and young people felt an improved sense of identity.



### More stable home life

74% of children and young people remained in their foster care or children's home after Lifelong Links compared with 41% of a comparator group.



### Reduced risk of homelessness

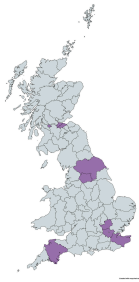
Young care-experienced people who live in areas which offer Lifelong Links are 10% less likely to become homeless when they leave care.



### Value for money

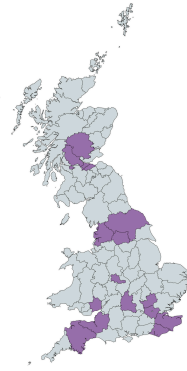
For each £1 invested in Lifelong Links there was a saving of £1.02. One local authority calculated they had avoided costs of £836,998 in one year.

## Growth & ambition of Lifelong Links



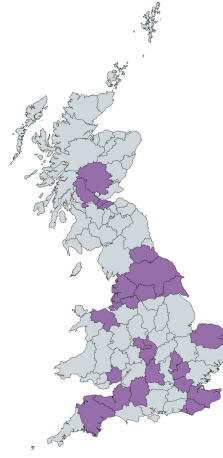
**2017-20**

**17 local authorities**  
**1068 young people**



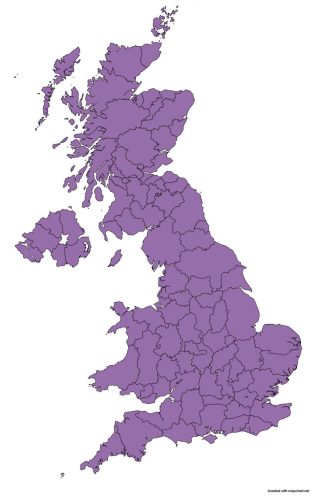
**2021-22**

**33 local authorities**  
**1848 young people**



**2023-25**

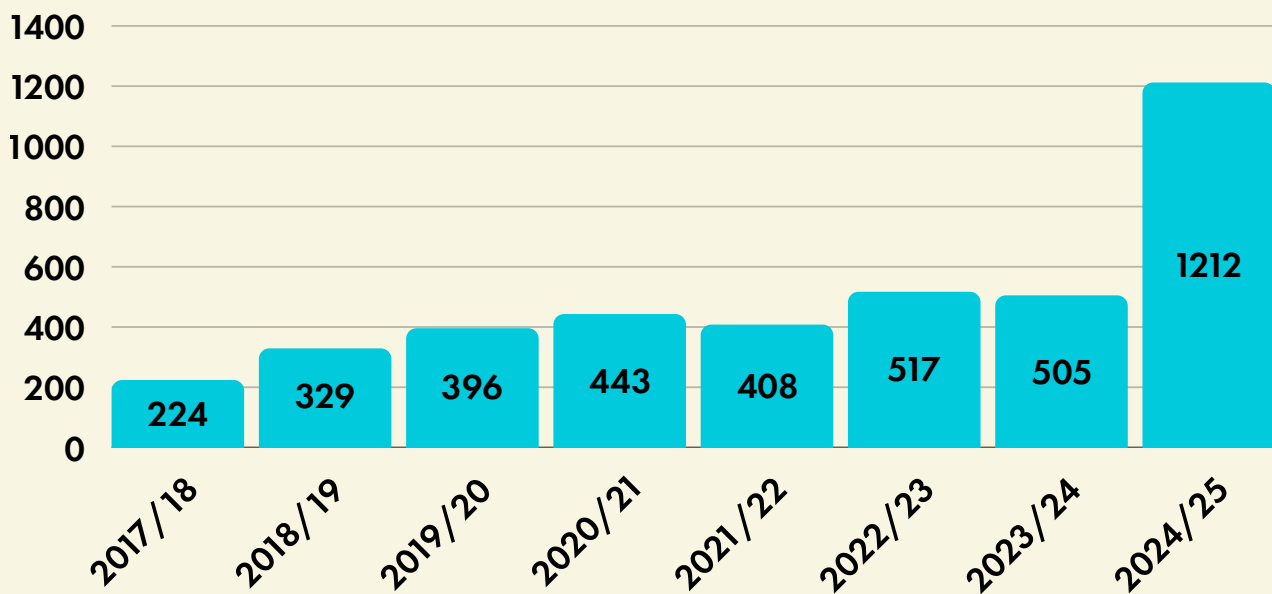
**42 local authorities**  
**4,034 young people**



**by 2035**

**All local authorities**  
**All young people!**

## Number of children offered Lifelong Links



**4,034**

children and young people  
who have benefitted from  
Lifelong Links since 2017

**1,212**

children and young  
people offered Lifelong  
Links in the last year

At the beginning of the Lifelong Links process, the independent Lifelong Links coordinator asks the child or young person what would they like to get out of it. Their individual objectives are recorded in a practice summary. 656 practice summaries have been completed and analysed so far.

## OBJECTIVES SET

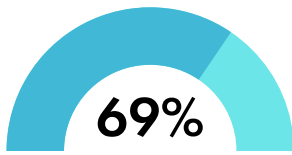
FAMILY	OTHER SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS	SPECIFIC REQUESTS	FAMILY HISTORY / IDENTITY	FUTURE SECURITY
59%	15%	9%	13%	3%

## OBJECTIVES MET

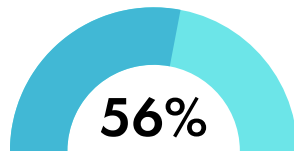


- Over half (59%) of all objectives set by young people at the beginning of their Lifelong Links process related to connecting or re-connecting with family members including siblings. This objective was met 82% of the time.
- 91% of objectives about seeing former foster carers, former professionals and other important people including old school friends and godparents, were met.
- 99% of objectives about family history were met. Children were interested in finding out more about their family history and where they came from. One Lifelong Links coordinator was able to trace one young person's family tree back to the 1850s.
- Almost a tenth of objectives were specific requests which were important to the young person, such as a photograph of themselves with their siblings, to know all the places they had lived, a plan for when they left care or to receive birthday and Christmas cards. 90% of the time the Lifelong Links coordinator was successful.

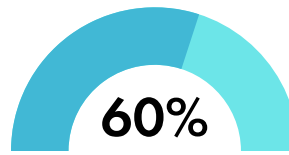
## OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



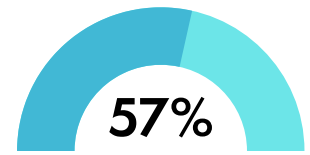
DIRECT CONTACT



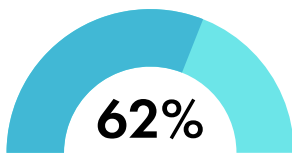
INCREASE  
NETWORK



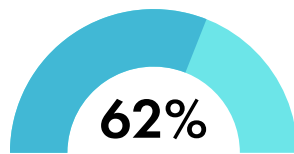
INDIRECT CONTACT



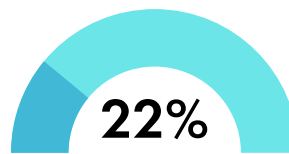
INCREASE  
KNOWLEDGE



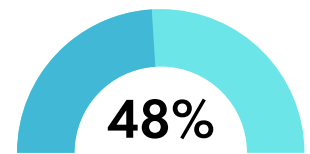
SENSE OF IDENTITY



LONG TERM  
COMMITMENT



OVERNIGHT STAYS



REPAIRED  
RELATIONSHIPS

- Lifelong Links has resulted in relationships being repaired for just under half of all young people. One boy, for example, thought his older brother had abandoned him, but it transpired the brother was in prison, is now released and they are seeing each other again.
- 69% of children and young people have been able to establish direct contact that they didn't previously have.
- Relationships have been rebuilt with former foster carers, including where they had broken down in very difficult circumstances.
- Over a fifth of young people are now having overnight stays with family members and other supportive adults following Lifelong Links.
- 57% of children and young people have an increased knowledge of their family history and 62% have an increased sense of identity and belonging.

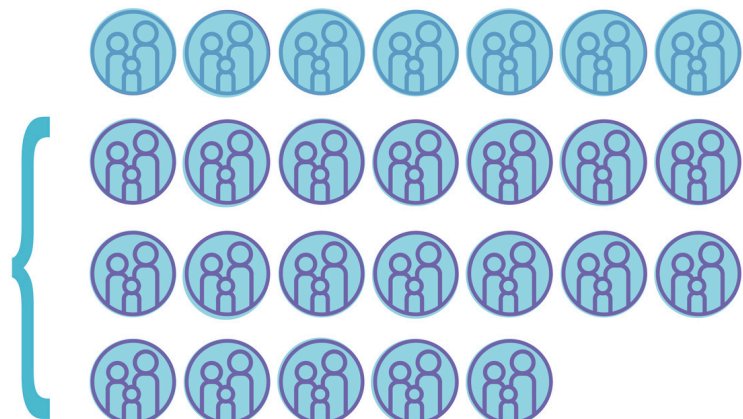
## INCREASE IN FAMILY & FRIENDS CONNECTIONS

7

Average number of  
connections that child  
had at the start of  
Lifelong Links

26

Average number of  
connections that child  
has following  
Lifelong Links



# Lifelong Links: recent developments

## Lifelong Links: adoption

Thanks to funding and support from [Adoption England](#) and in collaboration with several local authorities and regional adoption agencies, Family Rights Group is exploring how to adapt the Lifelong Links approach to support children and young people who have been adopted and are living with their adopted family. Following consultation with key stakeholders, (including adoptive parents, adopted children and young people and birth families), we are now in the early stages of adapting the model and producing supplementary guidance and resources.

## Lifelong Links: children's homes

Following a successful application to National Lottery's [Reaching Communities](#) fund, work is underway to increase the number of children and young people in children's homes benefitting from Lifelong Links. Three local authorities are currently being supported to expand their referral criteria, and bespoke practice guidance and resources are being produced in collaboration with [Break](#), a charity working across East Anglia to make life better for young people on the edge, in care and leaving care.

## Lifelong Links: London

Lifelong Links: London is a project that has been generously supported by a renowned musician and producer.

This support has enabled Family Rights group to work with a number of local authorities in London to implement Lifelong Links and make it available to all care leavers in their local authority. Our hope is that this movement spreads across London, ensuring that all care leavers have the opportunity to connect with family, friends and other people who have been important to them.



## How Lifelong Links helped Bayley rediscover her chosen family

Coventry City Council first implemented Lifelong Links as part of the initial trial in 2017. Their Lifelong Links service has since supported hundreds of children and young people. Bayley, a care-experienced young person from the borough, shares the positive impact that Lifelong Links has had on her, the importance of having meaningful relationships, and how her re-established connections helped support her during her transition out of the care system.

Now 19 years old, Bayley entered the care system at the age of 13, and has been living alone since 17. Via Lifelong Links, she was able to reconnect with former school teachers and carers that she now refers to as her aunts.

**“They always pop round, even just to see how I’m doing. They’re always there. They’re not my blood, they’re the people that I class as my family and you get to choose your family.”**

Bayley described the Lifelong Links process as being able to choose what support she had around her, and essentially be able to choose her own family. Having these relationships in place was particularly important when navigating the move into her own home. Her support network was able to provide advice and practical guidance, such as helping with an application for personal independence payments. This practical assistance, along with emotional support, helped Bayley mitigate the feeling of being left alone to figure things out at a pivotal stage in her life.

**“I think it’s crucial to build bonds with people before you leave care. If someone doesn’t really speak to anyone and has no support whatsoever and doesn’t have Lifelong Links. What are they going to do if they don’t really have anyone to go to and they are struggling? They won’t have food, they won’t understand the bills, they’ll feel lonely. It’s very unfortunate for them. I feel bad for them. I just want to give everyone a hug.”**

Bayley has now set her sights on working within the entertainment industry and hopes to become a TV presenter. She featured in the recent Channel 4 documentary about care-experienced young people, *Kids* and has also shared her story with BBC Midlands.

**I definitely think Lifelong Links should be nationwide. Kids are missing out on a great opportunity to build and reconnect with those bonds. You get to reconnect with people that you lost contact with and that really helps you in a difficult time. They get to choose to be a part of it as well and that makes it magical, kind of beautiful. That gives you that nice comforting feeling because it’s nice to know that they actually want to be a part of your life as well.**

R: Bayley and her chosen family celebrating her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday



## In support of



"Every care-experienced child and young person should have a stable, loving and positive relationship in their life. NYAS is proud to stand alongside Family Rights Group in support of their #BuildNotBreak Campaign. NYAS joins the calls on the UK Government to make Lifelong Links a commitment to all care-experienced children, young people and care leavers the right to make stable, long-lasting adult relationships who can support them into adulthood."

**NYAS Group Chief Executive Rita Waters and NYAS Cymru Chief Executive Sharon Lovell**



"All of us need positive, supportive relationships to help us at times of hardship and difficulty. This is particularly true for care-experienced children and young people, who see so much disruption to their important relationships. It is therefore crucial to build and strengthen positive caring relationships for every child in care, and for care leavers. Programmes like Lifelong Links make this happen and research shows that doing so helps to create more stability for children in care and will benefit them in later life."

**Rick Hood, co-chair of the BASW England Children and Families group**



"We all need our people around us, to be connected for life to those who care about us. Lifelong Links is a brilliant initiative that helps care-experienced young people stay connected to the people that matter to them. Become supports Family Rights Group's #Buildnot Break campaign calling on the Government to ensure this is offered to all"

**Katharine Sacks-Jones, Become Chief Executive**



'Every young person leaving care should have access to Lifelong Links. Members of the Young People's Benchmarking Forum have told us the huge difference it has made to their lives in terms of building connections, support and a sense of belonging.'

**Hannah McCowen, National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum Manager**



"One of the missions set out by the care review was that no child should leave the care system without at least two lifelong loving relationships. Making this a reality in the current care system will be tough, but the Lifelong Links programme shows what's possible."

**Josh MacAlister, Chair of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care**



Lifelong Links is one of the most successful innovations in children's services in recent years

**Isabelle Trowler CBE, the Government's Chief Social Worker for Children and Families.**