



2022-2023

# Annual report

A summary for children  
and young people



## Contents

- P3 What we do and how we help children and families
- P4 The Family Justice Young People's Board
- P6 Our year in numbers
- P7 Our performance
- P8 Our progress in improving our service
- P10 Preparing for the future
- P11 How to find out more information



## What we do and how we help families

**Cafcass stands for the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service. We independently advise the family courts in England about what is safe for children and in their best interests.**

During 2022-23, we worked with nearly 144,000 children and young people. The futures of these children and young people are decided by the family courts and it is our job to provide a service that prioritises their safety, voices and needs, taking into full account their families and those who are connected to them.

We work within the law set by Parliament (Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000) and under the rules and directions of the family courts. Our role is to:

- safeguard and promote the welfare of children;
- give advice to the family courts;
- make provision for children to be represented; and
- provide information, advice and support to children and their families.

We may be asked by the court to work with families in two main areas:

- **Private law** - These children's cases are brought to the family court by private individuals, generally in connection with divorce or parents' separation. The family court may make a child arrangements order (setting out who the child will live with and arrangements for spending time with other family members), prohibited steps order (about what is and is not part of a parent's parental responsibility) or a specific issues order (about things like where a child goes to school) or no order at all.
- **Public law** - Public law cases are brought to the family court by local authorities (councils) where they are worried that a child or young person is not being looked after safely. The family court may make a care order, a supervision order, or no order at all.



# Foreword from the Family Justice Young People's Board

The Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB) works to promote the voices of children and to ensure that policy and practice across the family justice system are in the best interests of children and young people.

*The FJYPB feature in the 'Taking me seriously: letting you know how we help' animated video which provides an explanation to children and young people about who Cafcass are and how they'll support them and their families.*

*"I felt like our voices and us as the FJYPB members were being valued so much." (Hannah)*

*"The feeling of being a part of something that will benefit families during stressful times really made me feel contented." (Oliver)*

During the Ofsted focused visit to Cafcass, we shared our ongoing contribution of the child's perspective to a range of Cafcass activities, including its recruitment of social workers and its practice guidelines and policies for working with children and young people in family court proceedings. Our feedback following our inspection of Cafcass' offices was to recommend that it improved its resources for children and

young people who are visiting a Cafcass office in order to make them feel welcome and comfortable at a vulnerable time in their lives. We have added that to our range of Top Tips along with a quick guide to Cafcass' Together Practice Framework.

Delay was the theme of the in-person Voice of the Child Conference in July 2022. Cafcass has led on our challenge endorsed by the President of the Family Division, which was not to normalise delay for children in family proceedings. This key message and the impact of delay on children and young people has influenced lots of partner organisations across the family justice system. Cafcass has embedded into practice the expectation that children and young people are to be informed of any possible delays and that they are kept updated. The FJYPB has been able to monitor the work undertaken by Cafcass to reduce delay. We have been kept informed and updated via meetings, emails, and regular attendance at the Cafcass Board meeting. Cafcass has valued our insight into keeping children and young people updated on delay in their proceedings.

The FJYPB has supported the development of the Cafcass 'Hear to Listen' freephone feedback service for children and young people and reviewed the feedback forms for children and families to use. 'My Cafcass Journey' has been redeveloped to ensure that the child is at the centre of subject access requests. We have also supported the use of introduction and goodbye letters for children and young people to develop their understanding of who is representing them at court and to let them know when they are no longer involved.

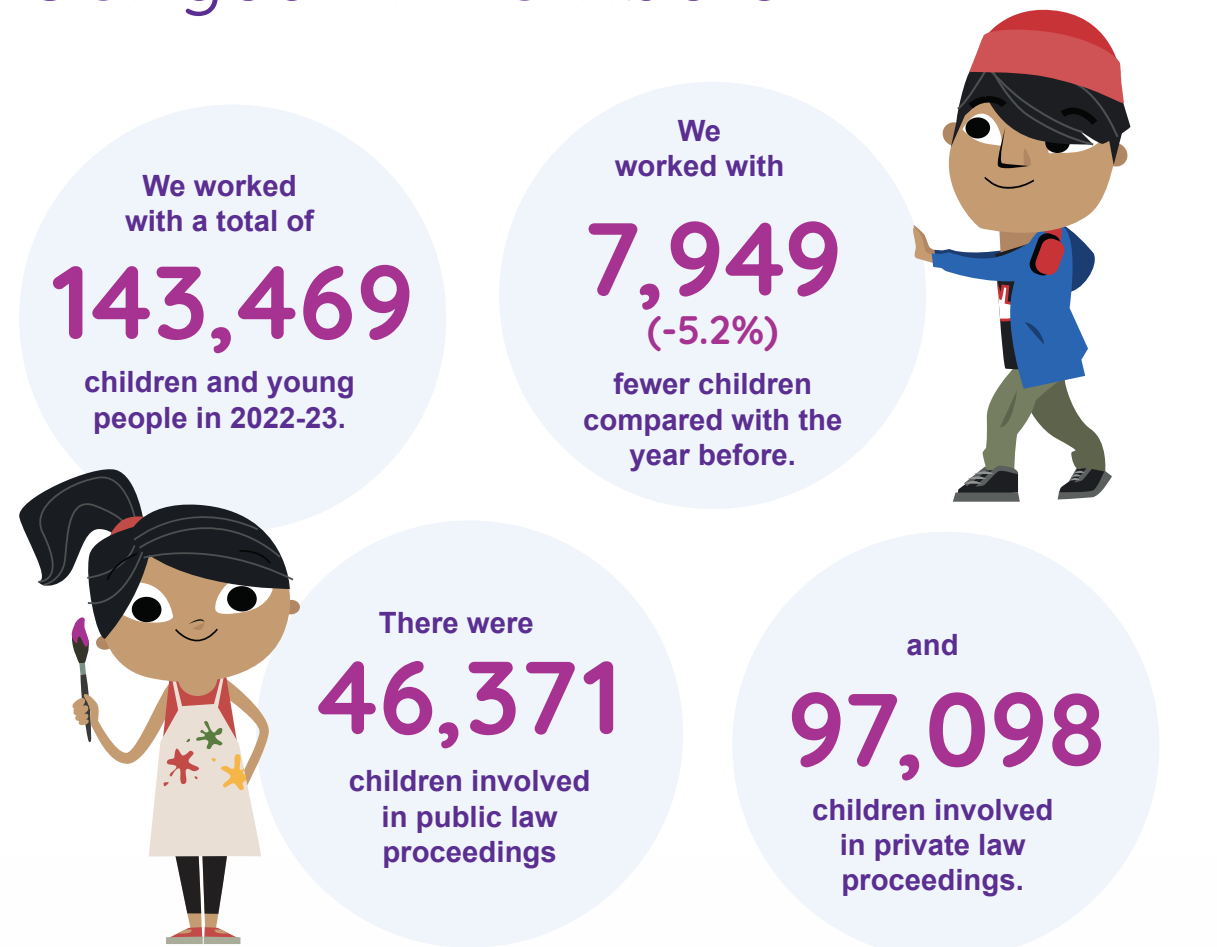
The theme of the 2023 Voice of the Child Conference was Building relationships: Exploring what children and young people need to enable them to build trust and be best able to participate in their family court proceedings in the context of delay. We focused our conference on the significance of building trust to support understanding and good communication, helping children and young people understand delay, feel involved in their proceedings, be seen and 'kept in the loop', and build relationships that reduce anxiety and develop trust. As representatives of children and young people, we want professionals to **start** with the child, **stay** with the child, and **end** with the child.

The FJYPB looks forward to working with Cafcass on a range of projects for 2023-24 including:

- Developing a children's version of the Parenting Together plan;
- Resolving complaints so that children and young people feel listened to;
- Working with children in care councils;
- Learning about safe contact from a child or young person's perspective in private law proceedings;
- Sharing recommendations so that we understand and influence decisions made on our behalf about our futures;
- Developing a FJYPB website;
- Opening the new Cafcass children and families practice hub office in London;
- Producing an overview for children and young people of all the professionals who may be involved in their lives in public law; and
- Having more meetings with ministers.

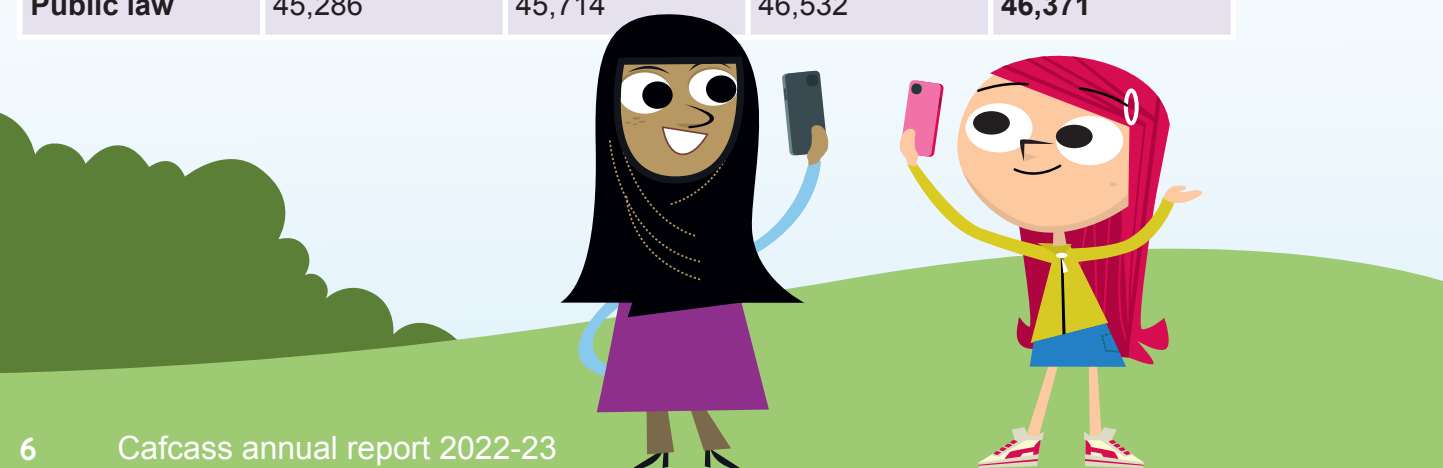


## Our year in numbers



Each year we work with **more** children going through private law proceedings than public law proceedings.

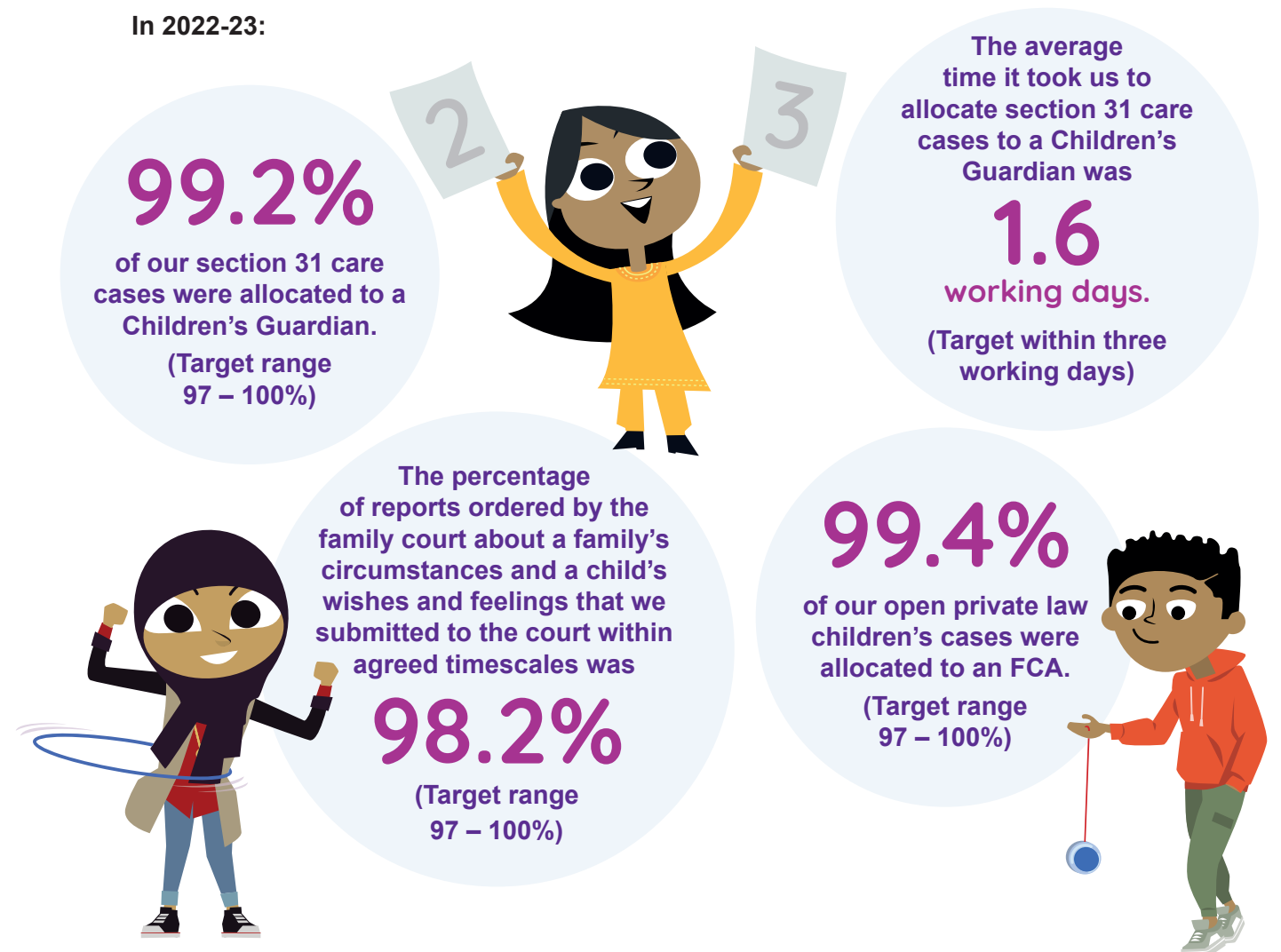
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
<b>Total children in proceedings</b>	140,983	145,359	149,018	<b>143,469</b>
<b>Private law</b>	95,697	99,645	102,486	<b>97,098</b>
<b>Public law</b>	45,286	45,714	46,532	<b>46,371</b>



## Our performance

We have to report to Parliament on whether children have a Family Court Adviser (FCA) allocated to them, how quickly we do this and how long it takes us to provide our report to the court. These measures are called Key Performance Indicators. You can see in the pictures here what our performance was like this year.

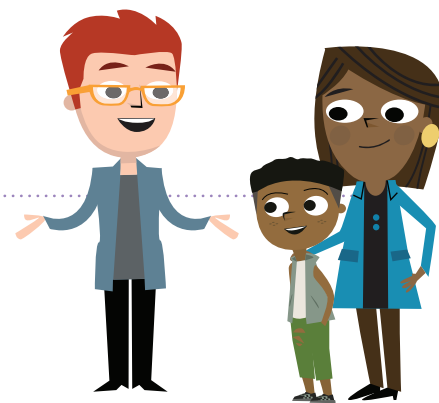
In 2022-23:



Despite reduced demand for Cafcass services, we are still working towards recovery from the previous hard years of Covid-19. Ongoing delays caused by the increased demand during the pandemic led to an increased number of open children's cases in 2022-23, leaving many children and young people in family proceedings feeling uncertain and worried about their futures. More demand has also impacted Family Court Advisers and other practice staff, who often have to repeat work and assessments if they become out of date by the time of a hearing. Delay for children and families as a result of longer case durations is now the single most pressing issue for the family justice system, and as such, remains a key priority for Cafcass.



# Our progress in improving our service



**Our strategy for 2019-23 set out nine delivery priorities which aimed to improve our work with children and families, our ability to support and retain brilliant staff, and our relationships with other organisations working in family justice.**

We developed these priorities in 2019-20 and adjusted them through Covid-19 to better manage increased demand and court delays caused by the pandemic. In 2022-23, we made significant progress across these priorities through multiple long-term projects. We also developed a new strategy for 2023-26, which expands upon this progress and our work to better support children and young people as well as their parents or carers.

## Practice (our work with children and their families)

In 2022-23, we published a new range of 'top tips' for parents and professionals involved in family court proceedings. These tips, written by [Cafcass' Family Forum](#) and shared on our website, help to show parents, carers and practitioners how they can best support children and young people through private and public law proceedings.

To manage increased demand on the family justice system following Covid-19, we continued to apply our prioritisation protocol across the country. Prioritisation has helped us address local challenges in delay and capacity while maintaining the quality of our practice and service to children, families and courts. As a result of effective partnerships working across multiple court areas, we were able to successfully ease system-wide pressures and deactivate our prioritisation protocol in Birmingham, South Yorkshire, Worcester and more. Learn more about prioritisation and see which areas are currently under our prioritisation protocol at: [Prioritisation protocol | Cafcass](#).

We also committed to a significant culture change programme which was made possible by the development and implementation of our practice framework, [Together with Children and Families](#). Our focus in this area was to prioritise listening to and understanding children's experience, using clear and respectful language and providing opportunities for them to hear, contribute to and better understand the reasons we make certain recommendations for them to the courts.



## People (our plan to make sure Cafcass is always a brilliant place for brilliant people to work)

Throughout this reporting year, we also made improvements for Cafcass staff. We have done this by developing leadership and management quality standards and embedding an annual staff survey which we intend to repeat. Following the publication of our **equality, diversity and inclusion** objectives and strategy in 2022, we have also launched three new programmes on our Talent Pathway for Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff, all of which committed to improving representation and developing a workforce which better represents the diversity and uniqueness of the children and families with whom we work.

These projects, alongside other initiatives intended to further support Cafcass staff, were inspected during a focused visit from Ofsted in January 2023. The report found that, despite the significant impact of high demand, senior leaders and management staff had provided proactive leadership and continued to demonstrate their commitment to improving children's experience of their family proceedings.

## Partners (our work with other organisations to make the family courts better for families)

We have continued to work closely with partners during 2022-23 to ensure that we and other organisations involved in family justice remain focused on system recovery, reducing delay and minimising its impact on children and young people.

One of the ways we did this was by testing a new approach to private law with the Ministry of Justice Pathfinder pilot in Dorset. This pilot considers how earlier support and information gathering in private law proceedings and cases where domestic abuse is known or alleged can shorten case durations and improve families' experience of family court. Our learning from Dorset's Pathfinder court will play a key role in the delivery of our Private Law Improvement Programme during 2023-26, which aims to further reduce delay and make the family justice system work better for children and young people.

In April 2023, we also collaborated with [Action for Children](#) to launch the new Planning Together for Children programme. This co-operative parenting resource replaced the Separated Parents Information Programme (SPIP) and is intended to encourage non-harmful communication between parents and deliver better outcomes for children.

**You can learn more about our plans to further improve our practice, better support our people, and continue working together with our partners on the next page.**



# Preparing for the future

To expand upon the progress made against our 2019-23 delivery priorities, Cafcass developed and launched a new strategic plan for 2023-26 called “[Ambitious for Children](#)”. This strategy has three main goals or “ambitions” for Cafcass practice, people and partners – all of which aim to offer an exceptional experience for the children and young people with whom we work, everywhere and every time.

## Our PRACTICE ambition

Cafcass’ practice ambition is to provide all children and young people with an exceptional experience, everywhere and every time. We will achieve this by making further improvements to our work in and beyond the family court by using the Together with Children and Families practice framework and [practice and management quality standards](#) as a foundation. We also plan to actively seek feedback from the children and families with whom we work and to share our recommendations to the court with them, so they have the opportunity to express their views and concerns in response.

## Our PEOPLE ambition

Our people ambition is to provide everyone who works for Cafcass with the leadership, professional development and working environment they need to continue supporting the children and families who rely on them. We will achieve this by offering career development opportunities and by encouraging leaders to remain visible, effective and clear in their decision-making at Cafcass. Finally, we will work hard to attract, retain and engage diverse, skilled and highly motivated people who hold the welfare, wishes and best interests of children at the heart of their practice.

## Our PARTNERS ambition

Cafcass’ partners ambition is to continue collaborating on system recovery - specifically delay for children in proceedings - and to seek the views and perspectives of those partners on improving children’s and families’ experiences of proceedings and other support services. We will achieve this by working closely and clearly with partners to make more positive changes in support of national Family Justice Board priorities. Specifically, we hope to learn from these partnerships and then use this learning to develop new ways of working with children and families so that they better understand what is happening in their case and can participate effectively.



# How to find out more information

You can find more information about Cafcass and the Family Justice Young People’s Board on our website:

[www.cafcass.gov.uk/family-justice-young-peoples-board](http://www.cafcass.gov.uk/family-justice-young-peoples-board)

There is also a glossary which explains what the words used in this report mean.

[Glossary and Word Busting | Cafcass](#)

To provide feedback to us about your experience of being involved with Cafcass, please visit:

[Get in touch, give feedback or complain | Cafcass](#)

[www.cafcass.gov.uk](http://www.cafcass.gov.uk)

