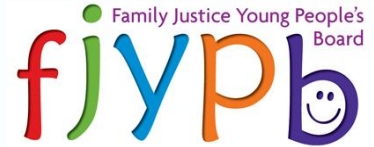


Voice of the Child 2025 Conference summary



VOTC 2025

This year, the Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB) held their annual Voice of The Child virtual conference on the 31 of July 2025.

The theme of our Voice of the Child conference was **Empowering me for my future**: Our aim was to focus on keeping children and young people safe and exploring how services and professionals support children and young people to understand and feel safe with the decisions made about their future lives.

FJYPB members Hannah Jean, Charlotte and Chidinma shared their personal experiences of the family justice system with us. These were all impactful and thought provoking.

This summary includes the key messages from the FJYPB for professionals to take away, and highlights from the day.



At our peak, we had over 992 visitors to the live stream page.

Our 2024 conference had a peak of 499 visitors, meaning our 2025 conference had a percentage increase of approximately 98.80%!

Why empowering me for my future is important

The importance of us being able to understand the recommendations and the decisions made by the court and by the professionals that keep us safe cannot be overstated.

It is one of the most important responsibilities you have as professionals in both public and private law proceedings. These decisions affect us for very significant periods of our lives and in some proceedings, forever.

Making small changes in your practice can help us have a positive experience through family law proceedings and into our adult lives.

What does “empowering me for my future” mean?

For children and young people involved in family court proceedings, empowerment means more than just being heard – it means being supported to understand, participate, and shape their own future.

When professionals empower young people, they help build trust, confidence, and a sense of agency during what can be a confusing and emotionally challenging time.

“They understood the situation and always spoke to me directly, making me feel in control of my situation.”

“They treated me as a human being, with feelings and not another case to deal with. I felt they took me seriously because at the time it was hard for me to voice my feelings. I was encouraged to open-up in my own time.”

“I had a great social worker when I went through proceedings at eight, I remember her name and what she looked like. I also remember her being warm and making difficult conversations fun by letting us draw.”

Recognising the importance of culture, heritage and race

Our cultural differences significantly impact us, and it is essential that you have a good understanding of our culture so that you can protect us effectively.

This includes understanding how our cultural beliefs and practices influence our perceptions of child safety, parental roles, and accessing support services.

A lack of cultural understanding and unconscious biases can lead to professionals overlooking harm and potentially undermining our safety and wellbeing.

Deprivation of Liberty orders (DoL): How to respond to our needs

Professionals play a vital role in ensuring that Deprivation of Liberty orders are not just legally compliant, but ethically and emotionally supportive. Here's how:

1. Assess necessity and proportionality

Ensure the restrictions are truly needed and regularly reviewed. The order should be permissive – not prescriptive.

2. Prioritise suitable placements

Avoid placing children in unregistered or inappropriate settings. Advocate for specialist homes with integrated support.

3. Champion the child's voice

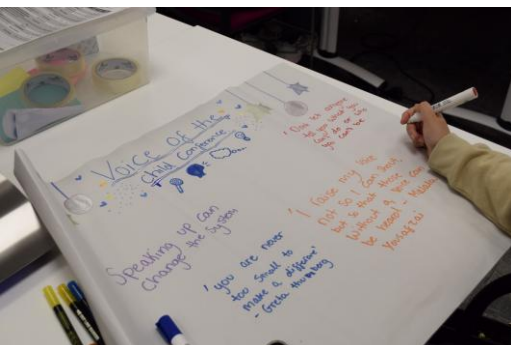
Include children in decisions, listen to their concerns, and act on their feedback. Their lived experience is essential to improving care.

4. Collaborate across services

Work with health, education, and social care to provide holistic, trauma-aware support.

5. Know the legal framework

Understand the criteria for deprivation of liberty, including the "Storck components": confinement, lack of consent, and state responsibility.



Communication is key: Explaining recommendations to young people

We need to **feel safe** with the decisions made about our lives and so we are asking you to:

- Explain why you have made your recommendations or decision and **explain** why you think it is the safest option for me.
- Check what my **support** networks are and that I know where I can get support if I feel unsafe.
- Show in reports to the court, how you have judged what is safe and in our best interests whether in current or future arrangements.
- Have you included all children involved in our family into your safeguarding thinking?
- Your recommendation or decision should be what is best for me **now and in my future**.



At our 2025 conference we launched this guide: **For keeping children and young people at the centre of their proceedings.** To help remind professionals about the things and ways you practice that enable us to feel included, have our voices heard and be kept updated throughout our journey.

Panel discussion: communication, consistency, and understanding me

Our panel session at the Voice of the Child Conference was a powerful opportunity to centre lived experience, and challenge professionals to reflect on how they engage with children and young people in the family justice system. Through open dialogue and personal insights, we explored the importance of:

- ★ Communication
- ★ Safety
- ★ Understanding me

These themes are not just best practice – they are essential to building trust, promoting wellbeing, and empowering young people to shape their own futures. If you were a child at the end of your proceedings, what would you hope practitioners did for you and how would you hope they had set you up for your future?



We want to say a huge thank you to everyone who took the time to create and submit a storyboard after watching the conference. Storyboards are such a powerful and fun way to capture ideas, and you absolutely brought them to life!

Whether you drew, wrote, or combined both, your storyboards showcased brilliant creativity and insight. You highlighted key messages, shared top tips, and captured thoughtful takeaways that we know will inspire your teams.



Here are just a few of our favourites

We loved seeing how each of you interpreted the day in your own unique way. Thank you for being part of this and for helping us keep the conversation going beyond the event.

The FJYPB challenges you

As the family justice system, why don't you know what our entire journey looks like?

How can you know what's best for us if you don't ask, don't track, and don't follow where we go next?

Ask us what we need for the future. Use our experiences and data to stop repeat harm.

Because if we keep coming back, then something didn't work the first time.

TAKE AWAYS

- 1** **Give us the right support.** Invest the time to truly understand the communication preferences and our needs, tailoring your resources and communication styles to meet them. Include how you will do this in your planning.
I need to express my feelings, worries and needs in ways I feel I can and not in ways that meet your needs.
- 2** **Listen to us** and replicate our words, experiences, feelings, and fears, especially when we are describing harm and abuse.
Would I recognise myself in what you have recorded about me, and would I feel that you had valued my identity and understood how it impacts on my life?
- 3** Support me in a way that **includes** who I am — my identity, my needs, and my place in my family and community.
How will you make sure I don't have to change who I am just to be heard?
- 4** Consider not just the immediate safety of us in your planning, but also what is the impact overtime in terms of **sustainability and emotionally**.
What will my life look like in 5 or 10 years if we follow this plan?
- 5** **THINK:** How are you supporting and preparing us to have a successful adulthood.
How are you empowering me for my future?

Voice of the Child's monumental impact

Feedback recorded during the conference allowed us to see the impact of the topics we were discussing. Panellists and other participants acknowledged past shortcomings and how professional assumptions can silence the voice of children involved in proceedings. Hearing first-hand accounts from children and young people reinforced a sense of responsibility and purpose in practice professionals taking part in and watching the event.

Following the conference, attendees promised to make their practice more child-led and inclusive. This would involve the use of storyboards, goodbye letters, and creative tools to improve communication and make the child or young person feel more valued and seen. They also committed to challenging unconscious bias and endeavouring to understand cultural differences.

The discussions from the conference will change practice approaches for the better. Participants of the event plan to slow down during proceedings so that the children feel less pressure, find out where children will feel most safe when being visited by social workers, and explain decisions clearly so that children understand what will happen next.

Many thanks to...

Our panellists:

Jacky Tiotto, CEO Cafcass

Nigel Brown – Cafcass Cymru, CEO

Helen Waite OBE - Director for Children's Social Care, Department for Education

Neal Barcoe Deputy Director - Family Justice Policy Unit), Ministry of Justice

The Honourable Ms Justice Harris – High Court , Family Division

Guest speakers:

Jahnine Davis – National Kinship Care Ambassador

Video message from:

Sally Cheshire CBE, Chair of Cafcass Webinar:

Emma Smale, Head of Practice and Policy, Nuffield Family Justice Observatory

And all members of the FJYPB!!!

