



2021-22

# Annual Report

A summary for children  
and young people



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## 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.

We worked with nearly 150,000 children during 2021-22. The future of these children is decided by the family courts and our job is to provide a service that prioritises their safety, their voices and their 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.
- 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 or a specific issues order (about things like where a child goes to school) or no order at all.
- **Public law** - Public law children's cases are brought to the family court by local authorities 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.



# 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.

We are really proud and fortunate to be supported and sponsored by Cafcass. Without them, we could not have published our book this year; In Our Shoes. Our first publication is a compilation of 35 FJYPB member accounts, setting out their experiences of proceedings, supported by advice for professionals about what it is important for them to consider when they work alongside children and young people.

Children's voices, represented by the FJYPB, are very much embedded into every aspect of Cafcass and we are in the unique position of being able to work across the whole organisation. We support all departments, including the Cafcass Board, with exciting new projects or reviewing practice and strategic priorities. We are invited to challenge ideas and to review progress made. We are welcomed into

teams who listen with intent and embrace the opportunity of working with us.

Our priorities for 2021-22 included a commitment to create two new national charters; one focused on domestic abuse and the other on equality, diversity and inclusion. Both of these set out the aspirations we have of professionals working in the family court including all Cafcass staff.

Our Voice of the Child webinars held in October 2021 were focused on language and communication, and how professionals can best communicate with children and young people. This focus has also been carried on through our 'Word Busting' project, working alongside Cafcass staff to remove professional jargon used within the service. Another of our key highlights this year has been in the development of the Subject Access Request

process which has now been 'word busted' by the FJYPB and renamed 'My Cafcass Journey'. This redevelopment has been led by two FJYPB members who made a request to see their files and who fed back on their experience. They were instrumental in working within the team to develop a process that is more accessible to children and is easier for them to understand.

In the next year, the FJYPB is excited to launch our very own website, host our Voice of the Child Conference in person, challenge the ongoing delays in the family courts and work with Cafcass to continue to promote the voice of the child in all the work they do.

Written by Imogen, FJYPB member

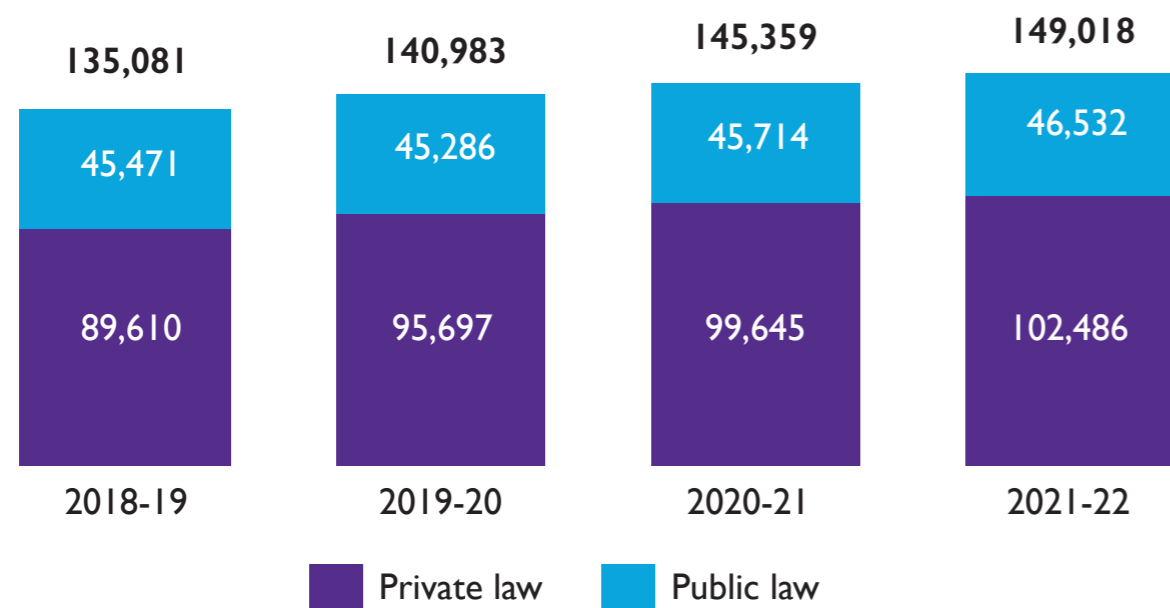
*Imogen has lived experience of private law proceedings and been an active member of the FJYPB since 2018. She is a lead member linked with Cafcass and supports the work of Cafcass by representing the voice of the child in Cafcass strategy and policy development, attending board meetings and as part of the Learning and Development Board.*



# Our year in numbers



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

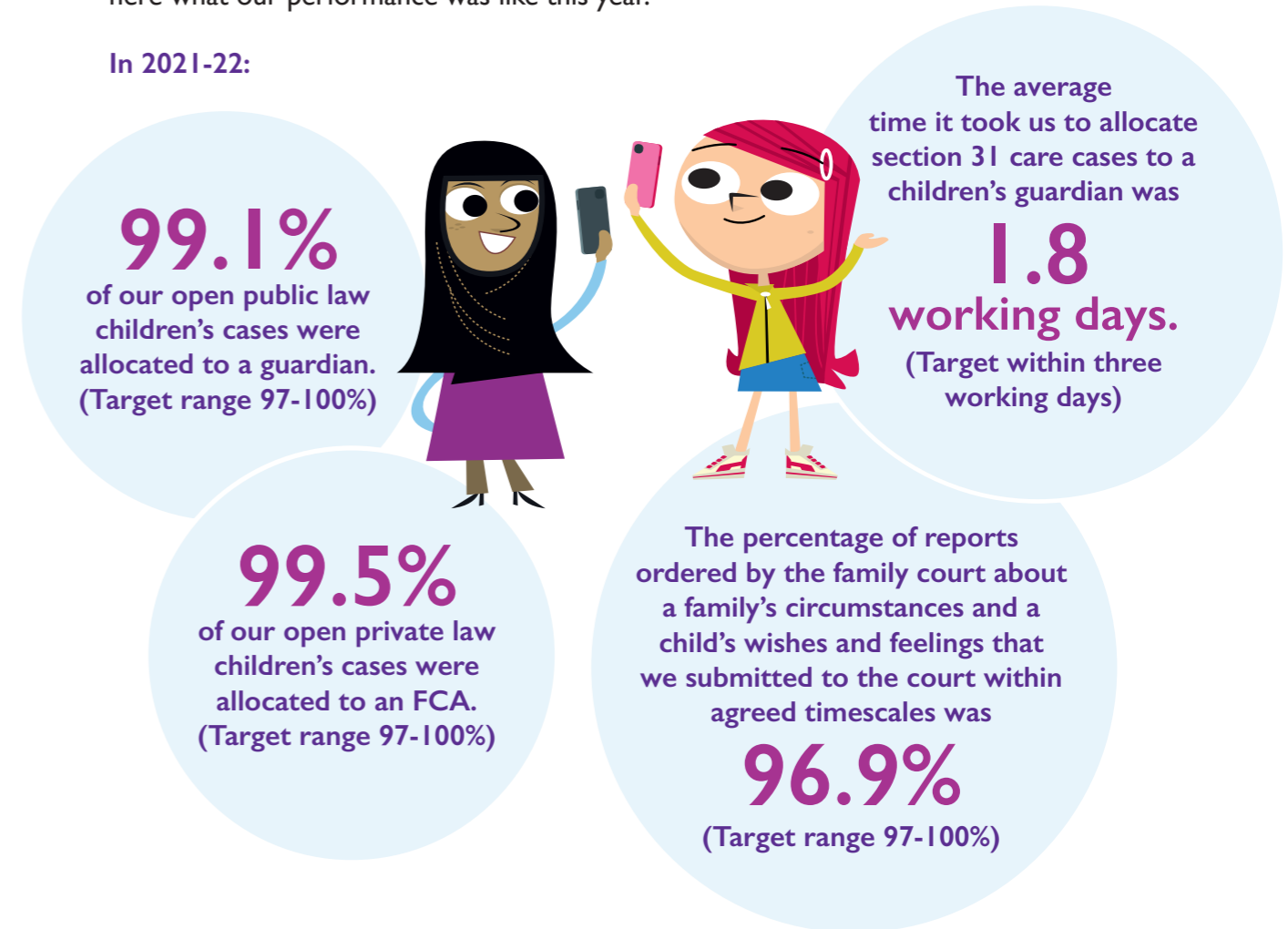


# Our performance



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 2021-22:



It was even more challenging to achieve a good performance this year, especially in reducing delay, because we were still dealing with the impact of the pandemic. This meant we were working with more children than before Covid-19 arrived, and also that children and families are still waiting too long for their cases to come to court or for a final decision about their future. In some areas this has meant we have had to prioritise which children need us to work with them first, under a system called prioritisation. Where children and families have had to wait, because their situation is less urgent, we have made sure a senior social worker is looking after them, and that they can still contact us to find out what is happening or let us know if their situation has changed. Reducing delays for children and families remains our top priority and was the theme of this year's Family Justice Young People's Board conference in 2022.

# Our progress in improving our service



Cafcass has developed a plan for how it will improve its work for children. The plan covers our work with children, how we will make Cafcass a brilliant place with brilliant people and how we will work with other organisations to make the family courts work better for families. We have nine delivery priorities in our plan and we made progress against all of them in 2021-21.

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

In September 2021, we launched our new practice framework which is called, **Together with children and families**. This helps us to improve how we work with children and families and to develop good relationships. It prioritises listening, understanding, clear-reasoning, respect, and integrity in our work with children and families.

We also did a lot of work to make it easier for children and families to give us feedback after we have worked with them. This is very important to us, because we can only learn and improve how we do things if we listen to what people tell us about their experiences with us.

We have five practice improvement priorities which we worked on during 2021-22. These are:

1. Seeing and engaging with children
2. Understanding the impact of domestic abuse on children
3. Understanding the impact of the child's uniqueness on their life and future
4. Implementing and embedding our new child's plan
5. Public law practice.

You can read more about these on our website.



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

We also made lots of progress during 2020-21 for the people who work at Cafcass. This included publishing our **equality, diversity and inclusion** objectives and we launched a detailed strategy for this in July 2022. Celebrating the diversity and uniqueness of every child and family we support, lies at the heart of what we do, and we want to provide the best possible service for everyone, whatever their background. Our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion is therefore a very important part of our work with children and families, as well as in how we treat everyone who works at Cafcass.

We also worked with members of the FYJPB to refresh our offices around the country to make them more welcoming for children and families. We are really excited to have now started introducing this new look in our offices.

Our people also began several important projects to improve the way in which we work with children and families in the future. You can read more about these projects on the next page!

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

We worked very closely with our partners to make sure that the focus for everyone involved in the family justice system is to reduce delays for children and improve how we work with families who are experiencing domestic abuse. In April 2021, the organisation which inspects our work to make sure we are doing what we are supposed to do for children (Ofsted), said after a focused visit to Cafcass that it found "a sustained and improved focus on children, including holding them at the centre of our practice" and "a passionate

culture centred around doing the right thing for children." We were really pleased to hear this and want to do more alongside our partners to make things even better for children.



# Preparing for the future

Cafcass has four longer term projects which will help us make bigger changes and improvements to our service for children and families.

## 1. Together with children and families

A new practice framework to hold children and families at the heart of our practice and to promote strengths-based practice, respectful relationships, clear analysis and decision-making in all we do. This framework reinforces and brings alive the new values and culture we want everyone to experience.

## 2. Workforce Matters

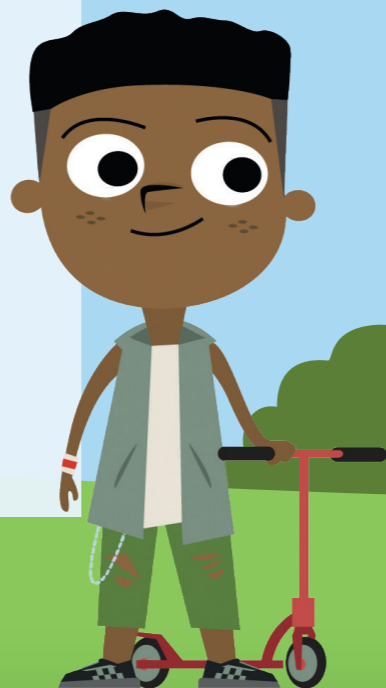
A strategy to maintain our focus on attracting and retaining brilliant people while at the same time thinking carefully about the shape of the organisation, and the roles and responsibilities within it. This will help us develop clear plans about how many people we need and in what roles and with what skill sets.

## 3. Digital Transformation

A new digital strategy to extend the range of activities we conduct with children, their families, amongst staff and also with our partners in a digital form (whether alongside or instead of physical or paper-based services).

## 4. A new private law model

We need to work towards a new way of working with children and families in private law court cases. We especially want children and families to better understand what is happening in their case, and how they can participate effectively. We want to build a better picture of family circumstances and children's experiences early on, especially where they may be experiencing domestic abuse or other forms of harm. We also want to be able to offer more help to the families who need it most.



# 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.

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

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

[www.cafcass.gov.uk/young-people/feedback-and-complaints-from-children-and-young-people/](http://www.cafcass.gov.uk/young-people/feedback-and-complaints-from-children-and-young-people/)

