



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# Cafcass Cymru Annual Report 2022-2023

For children and young people



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# Message from Nigel Brown, Chief Executive of Cafcass Cymru



**Thank you for taking some time to read our report which is about what we did between April 2022 and March 2023, and what we're planning to do next year. If you have anything you'd like to tell us about the report, we'd love to hear from you: there are some links at the end of the report for you to get in touch with us. We've also included a glossary to help explain some of the words you may not be familiar with.**

Now that the pandemic is over and lots of the restrictions to the way we work have gone, we're getting back to a more normal way of working. However, we wanted to keep some of the new ways of working we started doing – like the ability to meet people remotely – if that is better for them. So our 'new normal' way of working is to ask the people we work with which way they want to meet with us. Lots of young people prefer to talk to us remotely, but some prefer us to meet them face to face, either way is good, and we want to give people the choice.

During this year Cafcass Cymru had an 'Assurance Check', from Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). This included speaking with children and their families or carers, looking at our files and meeting with judges to find out about the quality of our work. I was delighted they were able to tell us we are doing well, but there were a few things we could improve on. We are now working on their recommendations to improve the things that we need to.

Cafcass Cymru is part of the wider Family Justice System in Wales. We have a key role in making sure improvements to how children and young people feel their views are listened to when they are involved with the family courts.

This year we were involved in a number of new projects that aim to help all of us in the Family Justice System improve the experiences of children and young people.

**Here are some of the things we have been part of this year:**

- The Pathfinder pilot in North Wales. We have been working with the judges, local authorities, and other agencies to develop a new approach to working with children and their family involved in private law applications. We want to make sure children's voices are heard much earlier in the proceedings. The Ministry of Justice will be evaluating the pilot to see how effective it is.
- From March 2023 we have a university student working with us who will spend 6 months finding out about children and young people's experiences of being part of family courts and in particular Pathfinder courts.
- In other areas of Wales, a new way of working in private law matters means that families do not have to go to court so much. This means that decisions are made quicker for children. We think it is much better for children and their families if they don't have long periods of time involved with the family courts.
- Finally, this year The President of the Family Division has re-launched the Public Law Outline. This means he wants everyone to work out what is best for a child in public law proceedings as quickly as possible so that children aren't waiting for long periods of time to know what is going to happen for them.

**I do hope you enjoy reading the rest of this report, which will now go on to tell you more about us and what we've been doing.**

# Our Service (What we do for children, families and the courts)

We worked with  
**11,266**  
children or young  
people this year



Our job in private law is to talk to children, their families, sometimes their teachers or other professionals who know them, to understand how life is for them and work out with their parents or carers what arrangements are best for the children. Then we tell the court what we think by writing a report about what we have found out. Because all our practitioners are experienced social workers, we need to tell the court what we think is best for children we work with, even when sometimes parents or the children don't agree with our professional judgement. For most families we are involved with in private law matters, we are often only involved for about...

**15**  
WEEKS

Our job in public law is a bit different because this is where children are felt to be at risk of harm while they are at home. Similar to private law, we talk to the children and everyone else involved, but sometimes we have to write in our reports that children aren't safe to live at home with their parents, and sometimes their parents need more help to be able to care for their children safely. It's our job to help everyone work out what's best. For children we are involved with in public law matters, we are usually involved for around...

**34**  
WEEKS



Whether we were involved due to public or private law, this year we improved the way we find out about everyone's uniqueness and diversity. This helps us make sure we are working in the best way we can with all families we meet. Also as an organisation committed to listening and learning, we always welcome feedback, whether this is to raise a concern or share a positive comment. While we have had 66 complaints and 37 formal compliments this year, none of these are from children or young people. We will be trying to change this during the coming year with the university student's project that plans to speak to children who have been involved in private law, especially the Pathfinder courts. However, if you would like to have your say, please have a look at the links at the end of this report.



# Family Justice Young People's Board (FJYPB)

We are very proud of our great relationship with the FJYPB and this year they have again supported us in the following ways:



- Provided training for our business support staff, making them aware of the impact they can have on the children/young people they speak to.
- Provided feedback on some of our documents, making sure they are as user friendly as they can be.



- Been part of interview panels when we are recruiting new staff.
- Been involved with workshops around how we can improve our service.

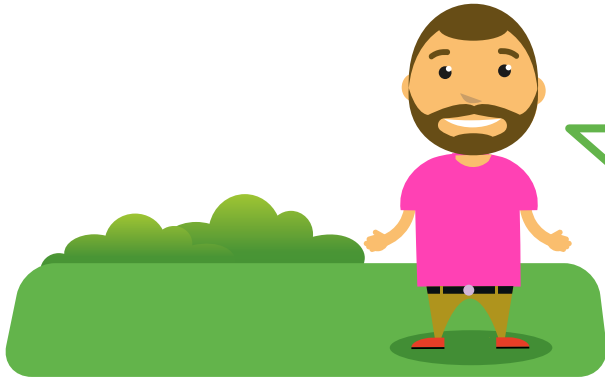


- Given presentations to our Advisory Committee.

You can find out more about what the FJYPB are all about by following this [link](#)



# Our Staff (people who work for Cafcass Cymru)



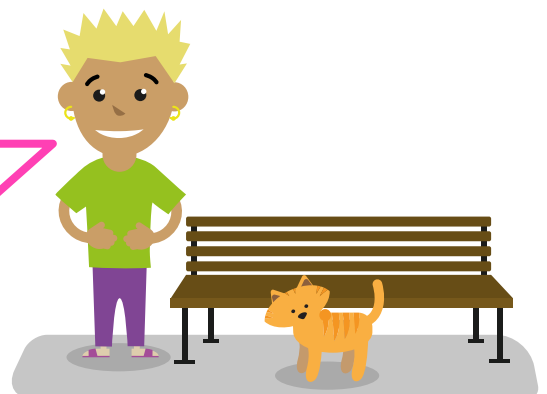
We have about 225 people working for Cafcass Cymru. Whilst there are different jobs our staff do; everyone is committed to working in a way that means children and young people are at the heart of what they do. We respect difference and promote diversity and we always aim to work in a fair, honest, and transparent way.

There is a senior management team who are responsible for making sure Cafcass Cymru is working in the way that makes a positive difference for children and young people we are involved with. They include our Chief Executive (Nigel), Deputy Chief Executive (Matthew) and seven people who are called Heads of Operations.



We have 140 social work practitioners who work directly with children and young people (you) and also help develop and improve how we work with you.

There are also 60 people who have a range of different roles that play a very important part in making Cafcass Cymru work effectively. We have people who look after our IT systems, help recruit new staff, manage our budget, co-ordinate our work with the FJYPB and respond to letters we receive from lots of different people. We also have staff who play a critical role in making sure all the information we receive from the court is responded to and the right information is gathered and made available to the court when they need it. There are other staff who support the day-to-day work, by sorting out post, e-mails, phone calls, adding information to our electronic systems, sending out referrals etc



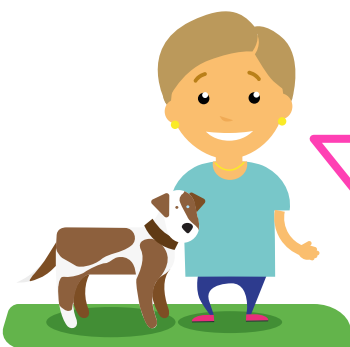
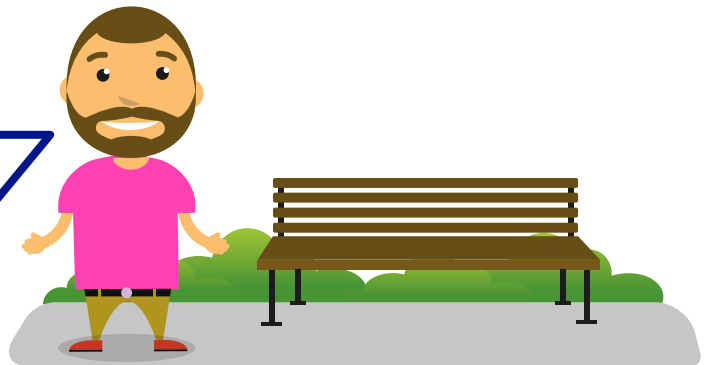
# Our Stakeholders (people or organisations who we get support and feedback from)

We are always happy to have feedback about what we are doing and where we can make improvements that will help everyone involved in the Family Justice System to do a better job.



This year, some of the local authorities' children's services told us how difficult it was for them when we recommended that the court ask them to provide a Section 37 report. These reports are needed when people are very concerned about the safety of children at home, but the children aren't part of public law proceedings at that time. We listened to what our colleagues in children's services told us and now we have made some changes to what we do, to make sure they know when we and the courts are concerned about a child or children in a family. We hope this change to what we do can help children's services support families that they may not know about, sooner.

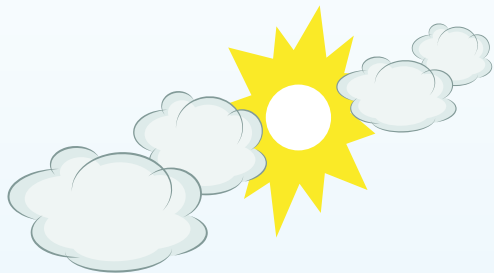
We also want to make sure that other organisations know if there are issues for children and young people that we know about, but they may not.



We recently had a question-and-answer session with the Children's Commissioner for Wales, Rocio Cifuentes. More than 80 members of our staff joined the session, and we raised a number of issues that we felt were important for the children we work with, these included:

- Secure placements
- Mental Health support for children
- Diversity and equality
- Supporting separating families in private law
- Impact of the covid pandemic.

# A look to the future



## Our Service

Acting on the recommendations from our Assurance Check, this year we will be working hard to put in place the improvements to some of our processes and how we tell the people we work with about us and about the outcome of court proceedings.

You can also help us to improve by telling us what you think. A link at the end of this page takes you to where you can leave us your feedback: we'd really love to hear from you.

## Our Staff

Feedback from our staff across all parts of Cafcass Cymru said we could do better by providing more training for our non-practitioner staff (staff who are not social workers).

We are now working with our learning and development teams to make sure we provide more of what they need to do their jobs, not just the practitioners, but the other teams too.

## Our Stakeholders

For all of us who work in the wider Family Justice System, getting it right for children is our main aim. Whether that's in the way children and young people feel when they are involved with us or in making sure that the best outcomes are achieved. We will continue to work with our stakeholders to constantly improve what we do.

Finally, this year the family court in Cardiff has been included in a pilot to allow specialist reporters to write articles for media about what is happening in the family court. This is a new idea, as before no one was allowed to report anything to protect the identity of the children and young people who were part of family court proceedings. This new 'Transparency Pilot' only allows approved reporters to write about what has happened, but they are not allowed to give the names of the families involved. We will be looking at how this pilot works for the children and young people who are the subjects of any articles.



Don't forget we would really like your feedback if you have been involved with us at any time:



[Link for children](#)



[Link for young people](#)



# Glossary

## **Advisory Committee**

A group of people made up of members of different stakeholders, we let them know what we are doing and how we are progressing, and they tell us if we need to do something better or differently.

## **Assurance Check**

Is a process where Care Inspectorate Wales, review the quality and effectiveness of Cafcass Cymru's main functions of providing expert advice to courts and safeguarding and supporting children and families.

## **Business Support**

These are workers who sort out all the letters, e-mails, telephone calls and make sure any reports get to the right place. They also make sure that people's details are on our computer system correctly.

## **Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW)**

Is an organisation that is responsible for inspecting social care and social services across Wales to make sure the services provide the highest standard of service to children and families in Wales.

## **Cafcass Cymru staff**

The qualified social work staff are sometimes called practitioners or officers, and work as family court advisors, or children's guardians. Other non-practitioner staff can be members of our business support and central support teams.

## **Chief Executive**

Is the person who is charged with the management of an organisation.

## **Deputy Chief Executive**

Is the next person (after the Chief Executive) who is charged with the management of an organisation.

## **Family court**

This is where important decisions are made about children, young people, and their families. It is different to criminal courts where people go when they might have done something wrong. Decisions in the family court are made by judges or magistrates when people need help agreeing about what is best for a child or young person.

## **Family Justice System**

Exists to help families resolve disputes arising in respect of family matters quickly and with the minimum of disruption to those involved.

## **Heads of Operations**

Are the people who lead different areas of work or teams within Cafcass Cymru.

## **Local authority (also known as children's services or social services)**

This organisation is responsible for making sure all children and young people in their local area are kept safe by the people who care for them.

## **Pathfinder Courts**

A radically different approach to private law, above all else it seeks to promote a 'safety first' approach, meaning those cases which require it, will have the assistance of the court, support to guide them through times of crisis and reduce conflict.

## **PhD intern**

University student working in a non-academic role, taking on challenges arising outside of their research expertise, and developing skills relevant both to their academic research and to the world of work beyond.

## Practitioners

Depending on what the family court has ordered Cafcass Cymru to do, the worker (sometimes known as a practitioner or officer) can be known as a family court advisor or a children's guardian.

## President of the Family Court

Is the head of family justice, appointed by the King and by law they must be qualified for appointment as a Lord or Lady Justice of Appeal, or be a judge of the Court of Appeal. The current President is Sir Andrew McFarlane.

## Private law

These 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, prohibited steps order or a specific issues order or no order at all.

## Professional Judgement

Using professional knowledge and experience, along with standards, ethics, and laws, to make decisions about goals, issues, advice, and suggestions. This includes making thoughtful choices that benefit clients or service users, showing discretion and informed decision-making.

## Public law

Public law 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.

## Public Law Outline (PLO)

Is the process that takes place when the local authority are concerned about a child's wellbeing and unless positive steps are taken to address concerns, the local authority will consider making an application to the court for a care or supervision order.

## Section 37 report

Is a report prepared by the local authority (Social Services) and directed by the Court when it appears to the Court that it may be appropriate for a care or supervision order to be made in respect of a child.

## Stakeholder

An individual or group of people that have an interest in any decision or activity of an organisation. Without their support an organisation cannot exist.

## Transparency Pilot

From 30th January 2023, for a period of 12 months, the media or legal bloggers who attend family court hearings in three courts (Cardiff, Carlisle, or Leeds), will be able to write about the case, subject to a very strict transparency order that will ensure children are not identified.