



One minute guide

Reducing Offending for Children Looked After (ROCLA)

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What is it?

ROCLA (Reducing Offending for Children Looked After) is a multi-agency virtual panel that meets every four weeks to support social workers and professionals working with children at risk of entering the youth justice system. It is a voluntary service, offered by the [Leeds Youth Justice Service \(YJS\)](#), designed to enhance knowledge of available support and interventions, with the support of an experienced multi-agency panellist team including professionals from; Leeds Childrens Social Work Service, [SAFE project](#), West Yorkshire Police, Youth Offer/ Youth Service, [Forward Leeds](#), [BARCA Leeds](#), CAMHS, [Leeds Virtual School](#) and the [Leeds Therapeutic Social Work Team](#).

The ROCLA protocol is underpinned by key theoretical frameworks, including the [Good Lives Model](#) and a strengths-based approach. These ensure that services are focused on building on children's strengths and supporting positive, sustainable change.

Leeds YJS, which facilitates the ROCLA panel, embeds [desistance theory](#) across all areas of its practice—making it a central element of the ROCLA process. The panel is also rooted in strengths-based, trauma-informed, and Child First principles, ensuring a holistic and supportive response to reducing offending among children looked after.

Through a robust multi-agency framework, the ROCLA panel delivers targeted support for children where concerns around offending have been identified.

Why are we doing it?

Children looked after are significantly overrepresented in the youth justice system, often due to factors such as emotional trauma, placement instability, and exposure to high-crime environments. Research suggests that children residing in residential care settings are particularly susceptible to being disproportionately criminalised within the youth justice system ([Prison Reform Trust](#), 2016). National data reveals that while only 1% of children in England are in care, up to 50% of those in custody have experienced care.

In Leeds, this pattern is also evident. Although children looked after make up less than 1% of the city's 10-18-year-olds (2023 Leeds schools data), they account for 13.5% of the Youth Justice Service (YJS) cohort (2024 data).

Without the right support, children looked after may face an increased risk of criminalisation. Reports such as [Laming: In Care, Out of Trouble](#) (2016) and the Department for Education's [National Protocol on Reducing the Criminalisation of Looked After Children \(2018\)](#) highlight the importance of early intervention and multi-agency collaboration to break this cycle.

To address this, Leeds YJS are committed to providing a prevention service for children looked after where there are concerns about offending behaviour, ensuring support is offered at the earliest opportunity. Our approach also focuses on increasing understanding of the key indicators linked to children looked after who are most at risk of entering the youth justice system or facing custody.

Through improved awareness and coordinated action, we can better protect these young people from unnecessary involvement in the criminal justice system and support them to achieve positive outcomes.

What should practitioners do?

The Reducing Offending for Children Looked After (ROCLA) protocol is designed to support children looked after where there are concerns that their behaviour may lead to involvement with the youth justice system.

Leeds YJS has identified key indicators that can heighten this risk, including:

- Substance misuse
- Involvement in anti-social behaviour
- Criminality within the birth family
- Peers linked with the criminal justice system
- Episodes of going missing
- Multiple placement moves
- Reduced school attendance
- Permanent exclusion from school
- Late entry into care
- Concerns relating to child criminal exploitation (CCE)

If you are working with a Child Looked After who presents with two or more of these risk indicators, you can make a referral to the ROCLA panel.

How ROCLA works:

As part of the Reducing Offending for Children Looked After (ROCLA) process, Leeds YJS convenes a 45-minute trauma-informed discussion to explore the best ways to support the child using a model developed in line with [Leeds Practice Principles](#).

This multi-agency panel meeting is designed to focus on the child's strengths, vulnerabilities, and individual needs. By adopting a trauma-informed approach, the panel ensures that discussions are sensitive to the child's experiences and focus on positive, constructive solutions.

Following the meeting, targeted interventions are identified, documented, and shared with relevant professionals to ensure a coordinated and effective response that supports the child's wellbeing and builds on their strengths.

Key contacts and further information

To make a referral to ROCLA, please email calum.cockerham@leeds.gov.uk with the following details:

- The child's name and date of birth
- A summary of your concerns
- Names and contact details of other practitioners to invite, including those from education

Once received, a referral form will be sent to you requesting brief information to help panel members prepare for the meeting.