

How Forge Care found a new way to work with children

123.2%

CAGR

Winner profile

This year's fastest-growing specialist care business is Forge Care, a Warwickshire-based children's services business that has built new facilities and a model of care completely from scratch

Forge Care is a remarkable success story. Launched by the Miller Family in 2019, the business has developed a new concept in children's services, providing care through a "therapeutic community" in rural Warwickshire. This community centres on The Forge, a group of four large detached six-bed residential care homes with communal gardens, sports, therapy and amenity spaces.

Gavin Miller, Managing Director, and his team built The Forge from scratch, recognising the need to work in a different way with children who have experienced disrupted development early in their lives. Many of the children supported at Forge Care have had to survive inadequate and harmful environments; some have not had support with neurodiversity conditions from attention deficit disorder to Asperger's.

"The concept of therapeutic communities had fallen from favour, but we saw real value in community living, even though you need such significant resources to

appropriately support 24 children living on one site," says Miller. "We took a very long time to plan the concept of The Forge, and to help regulators and commissioners understand what we wanted to achieve, so it's been a real journey."

The Forge site officially opened in June 2022 after two years in development and now employs around 70 staff. "Delivering the facility was only one side of the coin – we also had to work out how to operate something of this size," Miller adds. "Recruitment and retention in a single geographical location was one of many challenges, but we think we've overcome many of those hurdles and that the quality is now shining through."

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That hard work is also delivering commercial success. Forge Care has delivered a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 123.2% over the past two years – an unprecedented level of revenue growth in the history of the Alantia Specialist Care Fast 50 rankings. "We've planted a flag to show that this can be done differently," says Miller.

Difficulties remain however. While Forge Care's approach is attracting growing interest from commissioners all around the country, securing the right level of fees for the complexity of care delivered can be hard work, even though the business charges no more than children's services providers taking a more conventional approach.

"We need to sustain the business and to grow it," Miller says. "When new children join us, we can generally get the fees we need to deliver high-quality care, but securing fee increases for children who have been with us for a couple of years, say, is much tougher."

At a time when costs are increasing – particularly staff costs – such problems have the potential to put a brake on future growth. Still, Forge Care is now looking for new sites for further developments. "We want semi-rural properties that are close to a town or city where we can recruit staff from," Miller says. "The next homes will be smaller, but we do feel we've done the hard work of developing a model that we can now scale."

He's also convinced that local authorities recognise the value of supporting services that deliver good and positive later-life outcomes for children. "These are high-cost placements, but the alternative is often that children leave care and end up going into a never-ending spiral of crisis, dragging in mental health services, the NHS or even the justice system. We offer a more sustainable solution."