

A NATIONAL VOICE

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getting young voices heard

Stable Homes, Built on Love

**Experiences of
Residential Care**

Session 9 & 10 - Experiences of Residential Care

The two online sessions for children and young people took place on Tuesday 9 January 6.00-7.30pm and Tuesday 16 January 6.00-7.30pm.

The sessions looked at 'Experiences of Residential Care', starting with exploring the proposals outlined in 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' and what children and young people would like from staff and leaders within residential care. The second session explored personal relationships including staying connected with family and friends, how staff can show and promote loving relationships.

Who we heard from:

Over the two sessions, we heard from: A total of 31 young people attended the session.

They were aged 15-25+ and were from across England.

- Devon
- East Sussex
- Hull
- North Tyneside
- Southampton
- Stockport
- Worcestershire



Stable Homes, Built on Love

In the 2021 Spending Review, the Government decided to spend £259 million to make sure there are enough safe and good homes for children who can't live with their families.

This money will help create 95 new children's homes which will home 360 children and young people.

Funding will create 54 secure welfare placements and 10 step-down placements through the delivery of two new build and one rebuild Secure Children's Homes.

We want all children who live away from home to have the best care possible. So, we're making new rules called "Standards of Care" that will apply to all types of places where children. We're working with experts to make sure these rules are the best they can be.

As part of this standard, we will also look at the role of Regulation 44 visitors and consider how their role can be strengthened.

We want to recruit and retain staff with the right skills. The Government has committed to supporting the children's homes workforce by exploring options to introduce professional registration for staff working in children's homes, alongside a knowledge and skills statement, and a national leadership programme to recruit new managers.

We also understand that sometimes it's tough to find the right places for children to live. The Government are putting £10 million into creating groups called "Regional Care Co-Operatives." These groups will plan and organize places for children to live so that they can be closer to their homes and families. This should make things more stable and keep fewer children will need to move far away from their home areas.

Questions to DfE

Could there potentially be more training for adults working with children in care?

Fund therapeutic training for adults and foster carers working with children's home, care leavers and children in care.

How are the regions (Regional Care Cooperatives) going to be split?

Why would they want to spend £10 million on just that (Regional Care Cooperatives)? Why couldn't they just build like more things like more homes?

Do you really think the amount of children's homes you're saying is going to be enough? As a care leaver who works with the children in Care council we are seeing so many children coming into care.

There are a lot of contextual safeguarding, really big risks outside in the community, how are children's homes going to be able to keep children safe? And are they the right place for these young people?

What's the time frame for building new homes? It sounds really good and to have this massive budget, but it's the time frame that you guys are thinking right? Will you open some homes this year and more the year after and so on?

Questions to DfE

I understand things take time, but my concern is the amount of people coming into care to the amount of homes and foster care is being sourced isn't going to amount to anything like it a crisis at the moment and a lot of people are going through that.



What are your plans for the meantime? Because it it's a concern. It's all well and good. We're saying we're going do this over the next couple of years, but my concern is seeing these young people the way they are at the moment.

What do you welcome, wonder or worry about with these plans about residential care?

Welcome - Quotes from young people:



I welcome good goodbyes.

I welcome least restrictive practice. I think that's something that other placements should work towards. I think that would be really good thinking about these restrictive practice and how we can let the young people have as much independence as we can.

We welcome more powers to regulation 44 visitors.

We welcome regulation 44 visitors who have understanding of children's homes.

We welcome positive risk taking within children's homes.

We welcome step down placements. You know it will be a little easier for those young people.

We welcome therapeutic homes, they still need to have the same training and have the same standards of care as like a non-therapeutic placements.

Based on the information from the DfE that we shared:

Skills & training staff should have:	I welcome:	I worry:	I wonder:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Trauma and attachmentBetter training for therapeutic trained staff in homesTraining around importance of animals and how important they are in homesWhere I live we have a get to know the house and the adults systemAll training should be open and all staff should have the opportunity to do all training, including specialistMaking everyone as good as each otherCould be good to work towards. Staff trained under the same value system, but with different specialityI think staff need to have training on literacyMore promotion of advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">I welcome good goodbyesI welcome the £259,000,000 to create 65 children's homes, 54 secure placements and 10 step-down placementsPositive risk takingI welcome that in residential care I feel safer because there are more people looking out for you to make sure the staff are doing what they should be like ofsted and reg 44 where in foster care there isn't	<ul style="list-style-type: none">I worry about what's going to happen to me when I leave hereWhen I leave the house, homes need to have a further inspectionThat these homes aren't going to be targeted for children/young people with specific mental health and support needsThat placements aren't going to be split into age appropriate placements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">About house the homes are run, some were abusiveWhat skills and knowledge and training that staff needThere should be more therapeutic homesIf there were more communities/ opportunities for care experienced children and young people to come togetherI worry about how I and others leave. Uncertainty on where they're going, if it'll be good or badSomeone coming in needs to be independent to prevent bitesI worry about who they're going to report for all of those new homesI worry about the homes and profit makingStaff need to be fully trainedThe care system is full so children and young people are forever going to be living in children's homes waiting to go into foster homes

What do you welcome, wonder or worry about with these plans about residential care?

Wonder - Quotes from young people:



How you can fund therapeutic training for adults and foster carers working with children's home leavers and children in care.

I wonder if we need further inspections of children's homes. This could be the government or the local Councils, so they can see what is actually happening.

I think with the sort of therapeutic placements, maybe we should be coming up with an expectation plan what we should we expect from therapeutic placements. All staff that are going be working, should be mental health first aid trained as well as first day trained. I think those are the sort of we could look at like extra training and then also what other resources we can we bring from the outside. I think we need to think about what happens after they leave a therapeutic placement, I've heard people saying that they worried about what happens next to them.

I wonder how we can inform children of what placements are available to them.

I wonder how we can think about step down placements and moving on earlier so people know what will happen.

There should be an independent body, definitely outside of the home, where any allegations should be investigated.

How can we encourage outside organisations and the community to support children's homes so that children aren't isolated?

What do you welcome, wonder or worry about with these plans about residential care?

Wonder - Quotes from young people:



There needs to be more work on what a step down placement is? What a secure placement is? And what a bog standard placement is? You can't just have the same things that sometimes don't seem to work and throw money at it and hope that will fix it by doing more placements because people are just going to end up feeding the same.

I feel like there needs to be more links from residential care supported accommodation. When a young person is deemed to have high needs, is supported accommodation the right place for them once they turn 18?

I think there with some placements there should be the opportunity for animals. Animals can really support children and young people. I have an assistance dog now as an adult and growing up with animals was the one thing that got me through and got me speaking about things.

What do you welcome, wonder or worry about with these plans about residential care?

Worry - Quotes from young people:



I worry that it's all a bit too late and that the children in the system and who have left the system, not enough has been done for us and I worry also that it it's not going to work out.

I worry that these placements aren't going to be targeted for people with mental health and trauma responses. I went into a therapeutic placement which didn't help.

It's a large sum of money that is being invested and I worry that in might create a profit making for some businesses. Children's homes is becoming huge business and if you look at the last year or two there are a lot of investment funds and hedge funds coming into the game which it's not good. So how would manage this and stop it from happening.

I worry about what is going to happen to me when I leave the home and when I go into the wider world.

I just worry mainly about being able to tell what are good placements or bad placements. Councils need to look at it and how staff are looking after children and young people, and take further inspections.

I worry that children's home are an easier choice instead of looking for foster placements which might take longer. It's important that children feel it's the right placement for them.

I worry and wonder are they going to have therapeutic placements or is it just going to be a children home because a lot of children nowadays have a lot of mental health and this needs to be supported properly.

What do you welcome, wonder or worry about with these plans about residential care?

Worry - Quotes from young people:



I worry about inspections - It definitely needs to be someone independent that doesn't work for the company that doesn't have any ties to it because they can. If you have ties to accompany, you're more likely to be biased on inspections.

For asylum seeking young people I worry about what information is passed onto the home office, meaning that we don't engage with Reg 44 because you don't want to complain about anything that is happening.

I worry that we children's homes aren't aspirational enough – staff laughed at me when I said I wanted to go to medical school.

I want to say that I have personally experienced therapeutic placements which aren't necessarily therapeutic, they're more of a higher ratio of staff to young people, which I personally don't think as therapeutic like you can't just say well they've got two more staff on a shift now.

I worry that these placements aren't going to be split into age appropriate placements. So I was in a placement where there was multiple different age ages and they learn a lot of horrifying things that then got put onto me as children shouldn't experience.

What is needed to feel safe, settled, cared about by adults you can trust in residential care?

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4 responses

A place that feel calm and fun with slot of things to do that can help with our needs and mental health

kindness is a key thing that is needed for this

Be trauma informed and informed about how to treat other with special needs

I think there needs to be a training on LGBTQIA+. being a part of the LGBTQIA+ community I don't really feel safe in the care system because i am worried what others will think of me inside.

Quotes from young people:

We should feel safe and in order to feel safe, settled and cared about, we need a loving, warm environment.

There should be boundaries around things, but a child needs a hug.

Create an environment and the culture and ethos that can spread, I think the emphasis should be on the young people then, OK, we're going tick so many boxes.

In my council a lot of young people have moved with bin bags. We should be providing young people with luggage for when they're moving.



How can children and young people in residential care feel listened to?

I think with advocacy, there needs to be more effort in ensuring young people know about it. I didn't know who my advocate was or how to contact an advocate. I've been in out of advocacy services since I was 17. I'm 22 now and I still have the same advocate I had when I was 17. Who knows me well enough, but I think there needs to be more promotion of advocacy until you become an adult.

It's really, really important for young people to be able to feel like their voices can be shared and heard. But then not feel like they're breaking relationships are staff members or things like that.



What skills and knowledge do residential staff need? What skills and knowledge do residential managers need?

Quotes from young people:



P.A.C.E Training (playfulness, acceptance, curiosity, empathy).

Staff members actually understanding young people, how to verbally deescalate things.

Thinking about allegations and how are those sort of going to be treated? I personally think all allegations, no matter how big or small, is an allegation at the end of the day and should be taken seriously.

Specific therapeutic training over a number of areas to support children with complex needs, behaviours and experiences.

In training it would be really, really good for young people and staff learning about trauma.

I definitely think if that training should be open to all staff, and all staff should have the opportunity to take up training, whether they're willing to or not. There should be that variety of training available.

I think there needs to be more help with moving on into the adult world from secure placements.

LGBTQ+ training because I think recently people have been starting to acknowledge the fact that there are LGBTQ+ people.

There needs to be training on mental health mainly and how you deal with a crisis at that point because I've witnessed things I've shouldn't have never witnessed.

What skills and knowledge do residential staff need? What skills and knowledge do residential managers need?

Goodbyes as such a big thing in our lives.

I think there needs to be training on how you move someone. How you speak to someone about moving and develop ways for them to feel safe and secure.

More training on understanding professional boundaries and it's not taught anywhere. It's almost like guesswork of what professional boundaries are, so actually I think that is something that really needs to be taught, because if you've got those professional boundaries and you're working as a multi-disciplinary team together, then you're, 15 steps ahead already.



How do residential homes encourage/support/promote friendships?

Quotes from young people:

After school clubs.

Arrange times to meet up with friends.

Unsupervised time.

I personally feel like my care teams haven't tried to support existing and new friendships.

They allow you to participate with activities.

Meet new people sometimes.

I feel like care teams all expect you to be able to make/maintain friendships by yourself.

Dunno.

Barriers stop us from being able to meet certain people. They expect us to do everything related to that by ourselves.

The rule "no mates in your room" stops us from having a Normal friendship, because of us not allowed our friends in are own room.

As a young person I was told that there was a no contact order between me and my family, when in reality they just didn't want to support this.

Local authority's should try to help out more with friendships.

Day trips with other homes within out LA has helped. Attending children in care Council groups can build friendships.





How do residential homes encourage/support/promote friendships?

Sometimes it doesn't need to be physical contact, just having staff that really know you is affection. This can be getting to know your music and TV interest, planning to watch these with you.

Making friends was on the very bottom of any priority because there were things like going to school and whatnot.

Unless the young person themselves is actively trying to do it, it's not in, at least in my experience, it's not brought up all that much.

I wasn't allowed in contact with my old friends and I was never told why I wasn't allowed in contact and I believe contact with friends, family members, wherever you are is strongly important because it then got to a point where I didn't want to come back to my hometown because again, people would ask me questions.

In Ofsted and all the regulations - There's nothing about friendships, but we are trying to implement and encourage friendships, like getting them involved in clubs and going out and about in the community and stuff like that.

I feel like most homes are down to Ofsted, the system they don't think outside of the box and I think that's where the issue really comes from cause it's not in the regulations or anything like that or the care standards. It's more about promoting positive relationships with family.

Not to mention the amount of red tape there is because when you make a friend and you want to hang out with them outside of school or outside of like a staff member being there for per se because like you have free time or whatnot, they have to go through a ton of red tape, have to talk to your social worker, have to be cleared by whoever to be allowed to be around you.



How do residential homes encourage/support/promote friendships?

Throwing the excuse of safeguarding, that's not building a healthy relationship cause with the idea of making friends or just trying to make friends because you're putting blocks in the way for a healthy friendship to even start to prosper.

When I was in residential, it was always you can't have this person in your room because it's a risk that you'll go and have an affectionate with them, OK?

We should be able to meet our friends, have friends over, have friends in your room to do your hair.

I feel like care care teams all expect you to be able to maintain friendships by yourself, so I'm seeing this a lot now where a lot of young people are coming out the system or still in the system being diagnosed with. I'm going to use the words borderline personality disorder through what they've been through, which is an aspect of the an aspect of that is maintaining friendships. And and I still to this day, cannot maintain friendships.

And I think this is what the DfE need to understand is we need to put the time and effort into changing this because it's coming to a point now where it's gonna be far too late for our next generation of children coming through now that it's gonna be far too late to amend what is happened to them.

We need to be clear and adamant on standards on what is actually happening across the border. There shouldn't be one care home can do this, but the other care at home can't. It needs to be across county across the country.

What are your experiences of having loving relationships within residential care? Such as hugs and affection

Quotes from young people:

Alright.

None.

Days/ evenings on the sofa with our own fleece/ facemasks/ watching a film with staff are special moments.

This has been okay – can have hugs on my terms.

Sometimes this comes from other places such as school (sometimes) and Children in Care Council staff.

Being heard.

Some people do like us having hugs but it depends on the person.

My personal experience with affection may be different, as I grew up with it being seen as negative, it's still hard for me to show affection or receive it as I am still dealing with my feelings.

Not many experiences with that type of thing.

I'm residential care I feel like no one shows you what a loving relationship is, no one is allowed to give hugs.

When I tried to off myself I got screamed at by managers and staff because it was "a major inconvenience".

We was never allowed hugs, but we touched on it last week and I will say it again, there needs to be guidelines on professional boundaries like I think it is acceptable to give a hug every child, young person, adult needs a hug in their life.

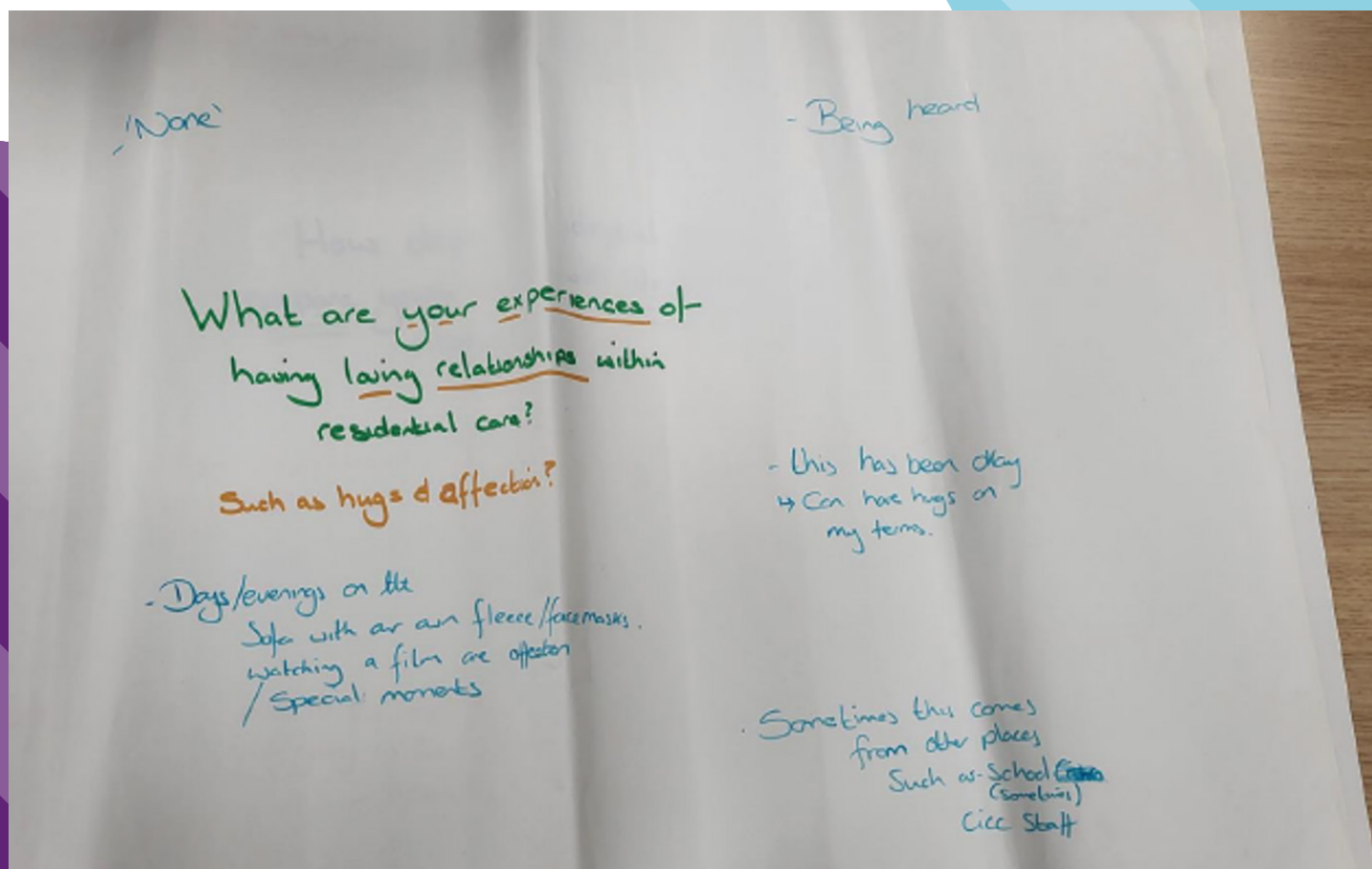


What are your experiences of having loving relationships within residential care? Such as hugs and affection

Some of us have never experienced a hug.

Like if someone was crying in front of you, you're automatic response is to go over and or would you like a hug?

We shouldn't not be deprived of that and relationships.



What are your experiences of staying in touch with those important to you? Were you supported to keep in contact with those important if you expressed

Quotes from young people:

Decent.

I think they help you quite a lot.

Hasn't happened, had to do it myself.

This needs to change.

No contact order are not cleared or reviewed.

Social workers are a barrier not always carers.

The staff helped me get back in contact with my brothers and stay connected to my Grandad.

I had to do it myself.

They provided help with getting a new phone after I had mine stolen so i could keep in touch with friends.

I feel like no one has attempted to help me to stay in touch with people I love.

It was all well, even when I went to them and went hi, can I get back in contact with my friend that I definitely haven't done behind you back at all? They're like, yeah, it's up to you. And there was no sort of help.



What are your experiences of staying in touch with those important to you? Were you supported to keep in contact with those important if you expressed

I when I first came into care, I said to my social worker, I want to stay in touch with my mates. I wanna keep seeing my great nanny granddad and my auntie my cousins. But for the whole time I was in care, they won't allow any of it. I had to wait till I was 18 to get that contact back and I am so grateful that my nanny and granddad and my auntie, my cousin, still want that relationship, cause my worry was if I went and I contact with them, is that going break that relationship down?

They would push letterbox contact on me which I found quite. I think I find that's so weird aspect because I didn't know the woman. I didn't know what she looked like. I didn't know who she was.

No, is the common view from our group.

- I think they help you quite a lot

What are your experiences of staying in touch with those important to you?

Has it happened - had to do it myself.

- This needs to change

- No contact orders are not cleared or reviewed
- S.W barrier not always clear?

Were you supported to keep in contact with those important if you expressed you wanted to?

. No - is the common view in our group.

How does residential care prepare young people with life skills and leaving?

Quotes from young people:



Decent.

I think they force you to grow up and make you feel like if you can't do it you will be left on your own!

I think it can depend from place to place due to space, some homes do have small kitchens where young people can't really have the room to have help with cooking skills.

I have no life skills whatsoever. I don't even cook. I'm scared. I'm going to blow the place up by cooking.

I knew I had to learn because eventually I wouldn't have it there, but it was still like this Cliff edge and I didn't add to pay gas, electric water or anything like that because even though they had told me they hadn't told me there was like, yeah, you need to pay these bills and like you do it online, where do I go, which providers?

I think getting a support network outside of just social workers and like this institutionalized like idea of care and what that means for young people.

But I think allowing kids to go and see, you know, people in hospital or allowing that freedom with support, I think is a really important it's so nuanced.

And life skills, I think, come from being taught them by your peers and being taught them by community and things like that.

It doesn't, they do things for you and expect you to figure it out for yourself.

How does residential care prepare young people with life skills and leaving?

Some do teach you/ to help show you.

Find it hard to budget.

No savings support.

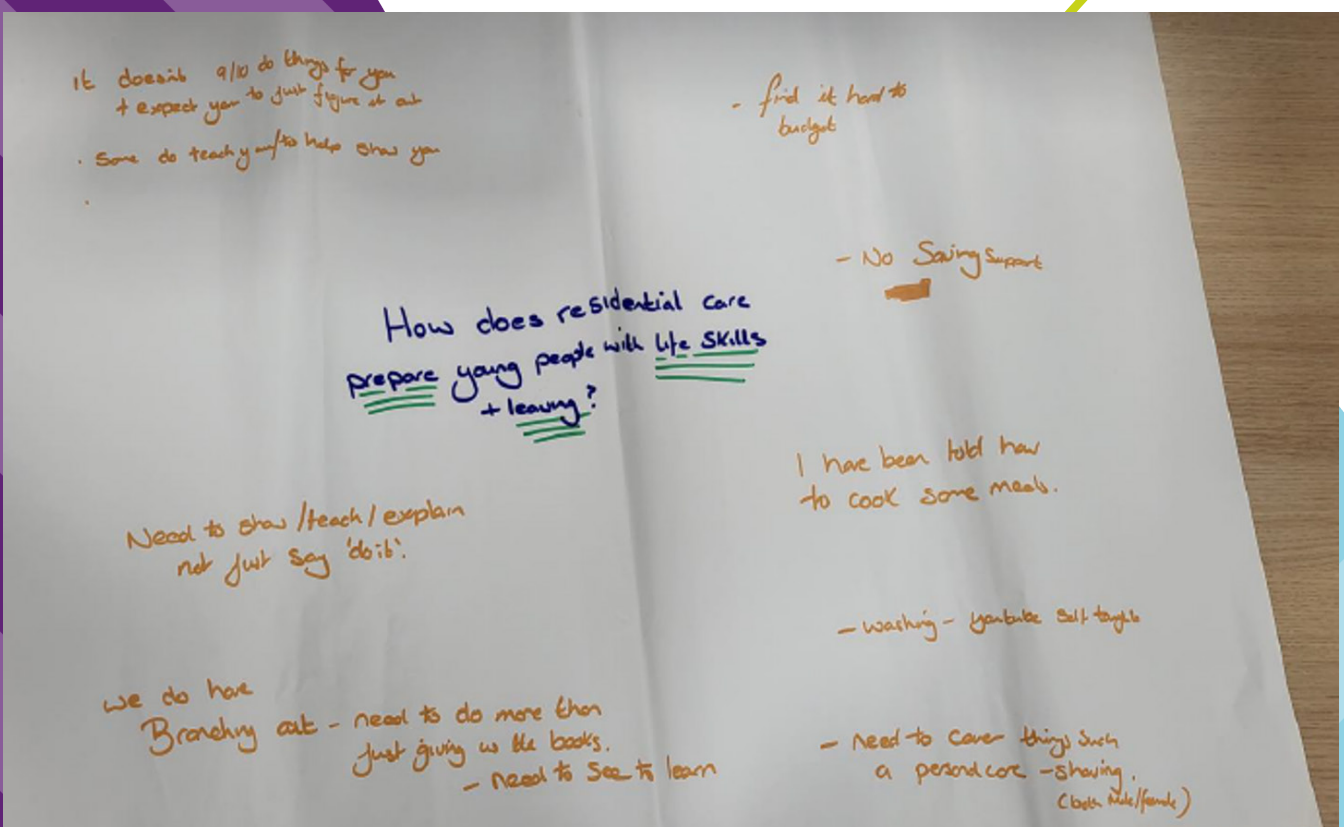
I have been told how to cook some meals.

Need to show/ teach/ explain, not just say 'do it'.

Washing – YouTube self-taught.

Need to cover things like personal care – shaving both male/female.

Need to do more than just give us the books – need to see to learn.



Key messages to policy team

- Young people welcome the investment in residential care but worry that it might not be fast enough or that the number of placements won't be enough to support children and young people in the future.
- Young people think that Regional Care Cooperatives sound like a good idea but would like to understand more about how they will work in reality and why so much money is needed to set them up.
- Young people welcome new care standards but think that they need to incorporate things that are important to them like friendships, family networks and other relationships. They would like care standards to cover different types of residential care which might require different standards.
- Young people think that regulation 44 visitors should have increased powers, should be independent and that all allegations should involve someone independent.
- Young people believe that there should be more effort to ensure young people know their rights and know what an advocate is and how to contact one should they wish.
- Young people believe there should be more distinction between therapeutic placements, secure placements, step down placements and children's home and that this should be reflected within the care standards and within OfSTED inspections.
- Contextual safeguarding, risk taking and supporting independence outside the home should be explored and recognised.
- They feel that staff should work together as a team. Young people identified a range of training that staff should undertake including understanding professional boundaries, mental health, trauma, LGBTQ+ and methods to deescalate situations.
- Young people believe that making friends is important and should be supported and encouraged, there should be less red tape and OfSTED should value this and the care standards incorporate it.
- Young people feel that life skills are really important and preparation for adult life should be taken seriously, this should include softer skills like making friends as well as practical skills such as cooking and cleaning.



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number 1046207**