

Messages to the Children's Minister from the ANV Network of care experienced children and young people

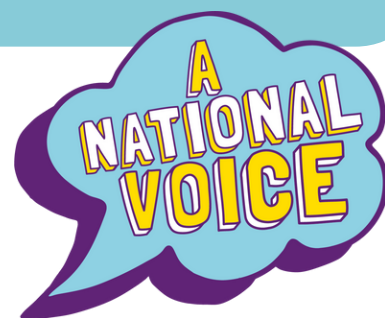
Jan 2025

Summary

- Following the election in the summer, A National Voice (ANV), the National Children in Care Council, pulled together the views of care experienced children and young people about what was most important for the new Children's Minister to focus on to make care better.
- ANV asked which areas children and young people thought the new Minister should focus on first, why these are important to them and if they wanted to tell the Minister anything else.
- **325** care experienced children and young people aged 4-26+ identified their priorities for Children's Social Care. They represent voices from **45** local authorities across England from Cumberland in the North to Kent in the South.

Top 3 priorities for children and young people

The issues that were chosen by most children and young people were:



1 Mental Health Support

Mental health support was the most important issue, chosen by more than 6 out of 10 care experienced children and young people

"Your mental health impacts everything; everyday life, education, just getting up in the morning"

2 Listening to young people in decisions about their lives

Listening to children & young people in decisions about their lives was the second most important issue, chosen by 45% care experienced children & young people

"The decisions made about our lives are often out of our control and without considering the people who know us best... us. It creates chaos and fear in young people which lasts a lifetime."

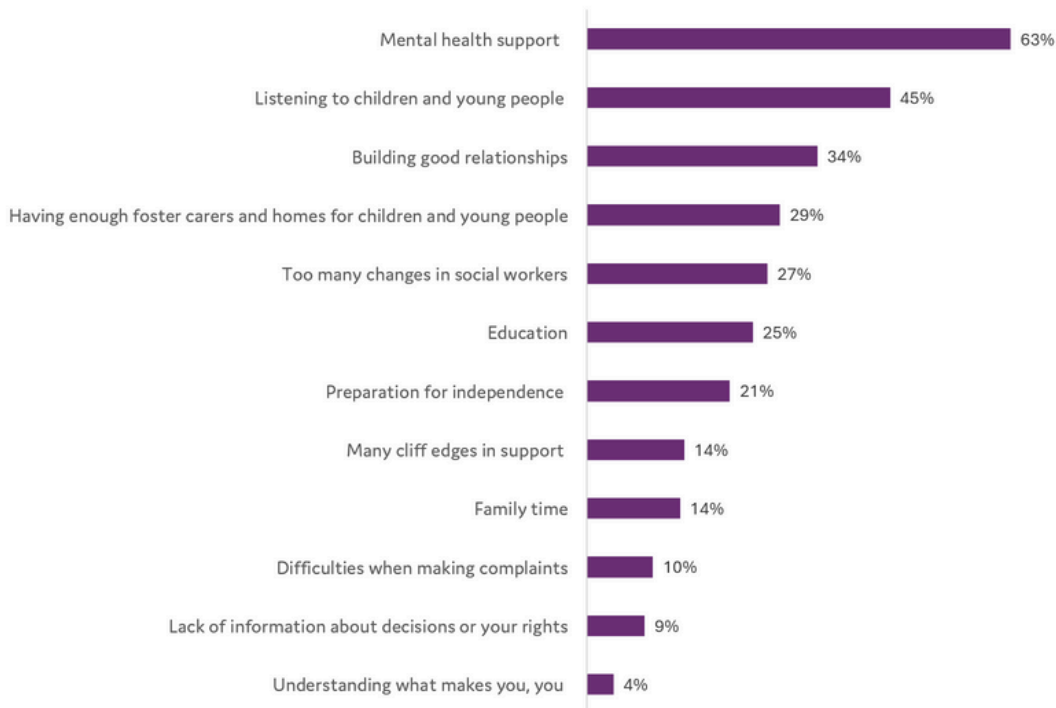
3 Building good relationships

Building good relationships was the third most important issue, chosen by over a third care experienced children and young people

"Because people come and go from (children in care's lives). We don't have the chance to build up a good relationship with them which is important to us...this is any professional, even foster carers."

The new minister should focus on

(Percentage of children and young people who chose issue)



In addition to the 12 categories, many children and young people also commented on stigma related to being care experienced.

How the Children's Minister should work with children and young people

"Children and young people must be key to your work so use them and use their voices. If you do this, then you will be able to excel in your position and in the eyes and hearts of every young person in care"

The children in care and care leavers who responded wanted the Children's Minister to:

- Take these considerations seriously
- See children and young people regularly
- Make sure young people are the driving force for change
- Let us know your updates and keep us informed
- Be honest and don't give misleading information
- Do what you say you are going to do and don't make false promises
- Commit to a long term vision and do your job well



Introduction



Background

In the summer of 2024, a new government was elected, and with it, new leaders were chosen to make plans for the future. The new Children's Minister, Janet Daby, is responsible for children's social care.

ANV worked with the previous government on a plan called Stable Homes, Built on Love to improve care. During that time, children and young people shared their thoughts on what would make care better, and we gathered all their feedback in our [reports](#). Now, with a new Children's Minister in charge, we want to keep this important conversation going.

ANV has been in touch with the new Children's Minister, Janet Daby, who has said she is keen to hear from care experienced children and young people about their priorities. She said:

'I want you to know that your voices will be heard by this government and we are listening. The government seeks to ensure that every child grows up in a safe and loving home'.

What did we do?

Every year, A National Voice brings together care experienced children and young people from across England at our national Amplify event. We ran a session at the Amplify event in October 2024, attended by **65** young people from **15** local authorities, to explore priorities for children's social care and messages for the new Children's Minister.

To give children and young people who had not been able to attend Amplify the chance to contribute, we shared the session plan with our network of children in care councils and care leaver forums so they could run the same workshop with their children and young people. We invited these groups to share their feedback via an online survey. Care experienced children and young people could also share their views independently through the survey.

The session plan and survey asked care experienced groups and individuals to choose the areas they thought the new Minister should focus on first. The list of priorities came from key issues children and young people had previously highlighted in ANV's work to inform Government plans. This included the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and the previous Government's strategy to improve children's social care, Stable Homes, Built on Love.

In the survey and workshop session plans, groups and individual children and young people could choose up to three priority areas. Where groups selected priorities, their choices were multiplied by the number of children and young people in the group. We also asked them to explain why the issues they had chosen were important and whether they had any other messages for the Minister.

Who responded

- **325** Care experienced children and young people participated.
- **282** young people participated through **36** groups and **43** individuals responded on their own.
- We had responses from children and young people in **45** local authorities, that is **3 out of 10** of the authorities in England.
- Of those who told us how old they were, about half were under 18 and half were over 18.

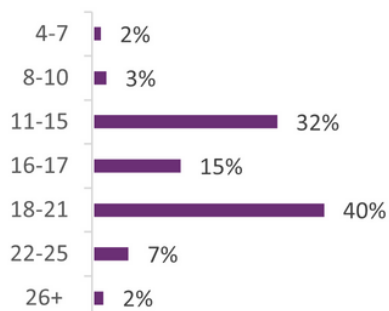
325

Care experienced
children and young
people

45

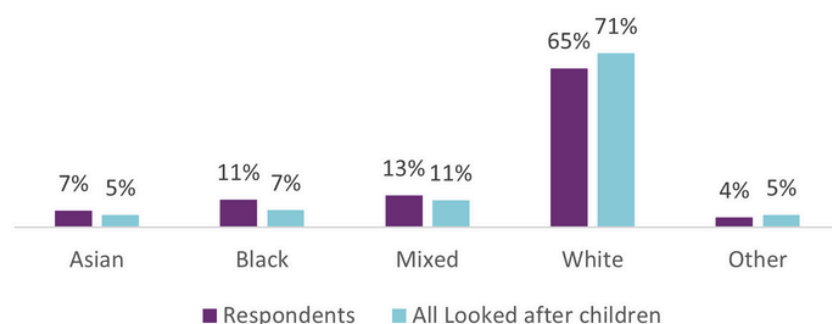
Local
authorities

Age range

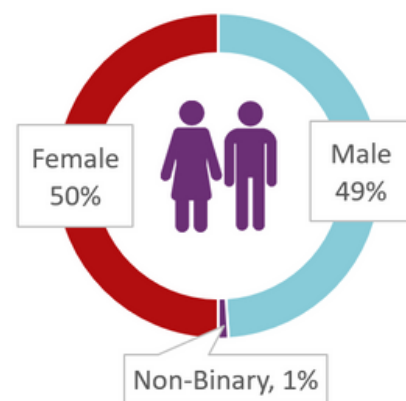


Ethnicity

(care experienced children and young people who responded vs. all looked after children)



- Of the children and young people who specified their gender about half were male (**49%**) and half were female (**50%**) and 1 young person identified as non-binary (**1%**).
- Where information was provided 3 out of 10 children and young people had a disability or long-term health condition and 7 in 10 did not.
- The ethnicities of the children and young people were roughly similar to those of all looked after children (DfE, 2024) with a slightly lower percentage of white young people among those who responded.



Priorities

The top 3 priorities chosen by children and young people were

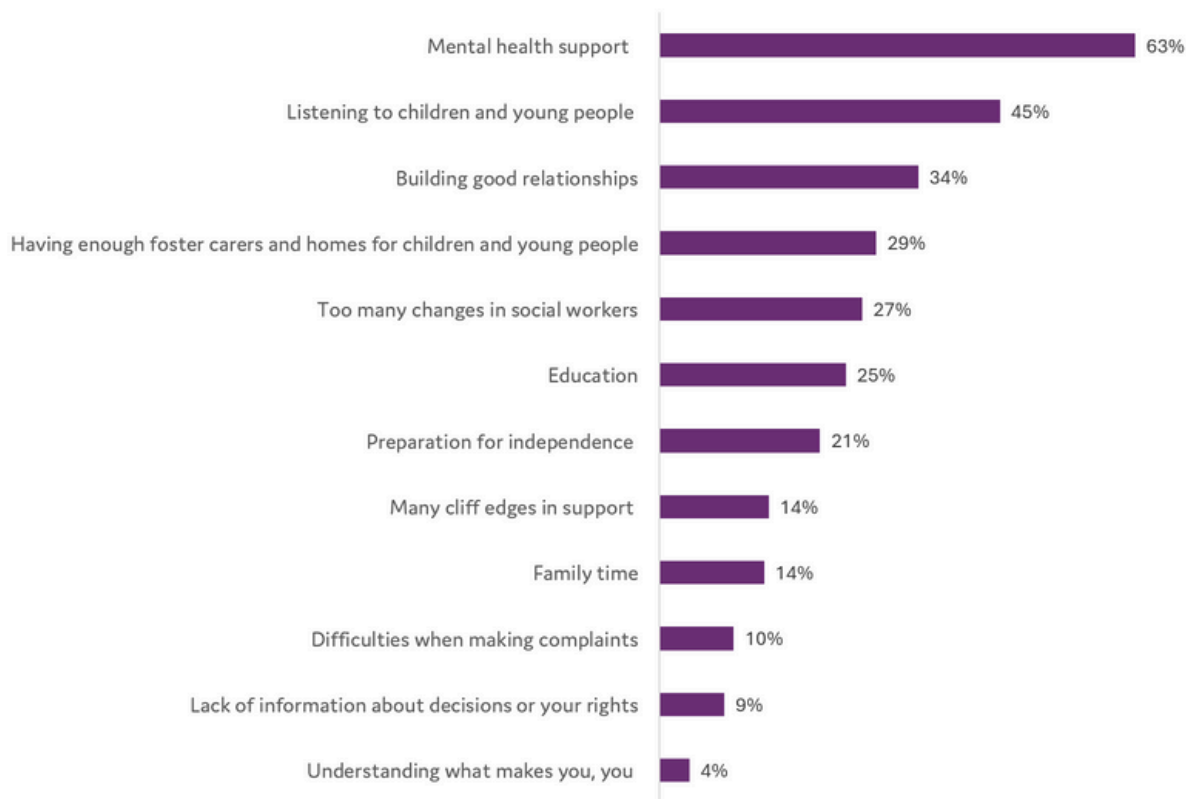
1. **Mental health support**
2. **Listening to young people in decisions about their lives**
3. **Building good relationships**



We suggested 12 priority areas and asked children and young people to choose the three most important to them.

The new minister should focus on

(Percentage of children and young people who chose issue)



In addition to the 12 categories, many children and young people also commented on the stigma that they face as a care experienced person and wanted to see more done to tackle this.

1

Mental Health Support

Mental health support was the most important issue, chosen by more than 6 out of 10 care experienced children and young people.

They felt it was important because:

"Your mental health impacts everything; everyday life, education, just getting up in the morning."

"We are probably all affected by it some time in our life, and it is important for young people to have that support."

"Children in care often carry a lot of emotional trauma, and care leavers can feel isolated."

"Young people who are care experienced are not having opportunities to deal with their background/history."

"There isn't enough funding and things like counselling and therapy."

"Our workers need to know about dealing with traumatic stress in young people."

Their suggestions for change included:

"Opt out rather than opt in" counselling and therapy for care experienced children and young people with "a counsellor or therapist who understands their experiences", with no "no cliff edge at 18 in the therapy"

"For care leavers, there should be dedicated mental health programmes that are easy to access without long waiting lists."

"Awareness raised among professionals who work with us around what we are going through" including "more and better trauma training for staff, teachers and foster carers"

2 Listening to children and young people in decisions about their lives

Listening to children and young people in decisions about their lives was the second most important issue, chosen by 45% care experienced children and young people.

They felt it was important because:

"Young people are the ones facing the consequences of your actions."

"The decisions made about our lives are often out of our control and without considering the people who know us best... us. It creates chaos and fear in young people which lasts a lifetime."

"Even if the decision they want is not in their best interest, [young people] should understand why these things cannot happen."

"There has been many situations where it just ticks a box and the information doesn't go anywhere and changes don't happen."

"It would help prevent issues around the placement and help build confidence and self esteem. It is also more cost effective as funding wouldn't be wasted on unnecessary services/support."

Their suggestions for change included:

"More time with social workers as I haven't finished my life story work yet as she has no time for it."

"Let children make decisions about homes we are put in. Let us know about the choices. Don't just make the choice for us."

"There should be a way to tell more than one person (like the social worker manager)...if [social workers] are not doing what they should."

"Create a national independent advocacy service so every child has someone who will stand up for them and help them through tough decisions."

"[Create] opportunities like this, to come together with others, change stuff, have opportunity to participate, have a platform to give young people a voice", for example "setting up a national council of care-experienced people to advise the minister"

3

Building good relationships

Building good relationships was the third most important issue, chosen by over a third care experienced children and young people

They felt it was important because:

"Sometimes you just need one person to care about you to make you believe that you matter."

"Because people come and go from (children in care's lives). We don't have the chance to build up a good relationship with them which is important to us...this is any professional, even foster carers."

"Being around people you get on well with helps you, your self esteem and your mental health."

"For many children in care it's very difficult to make or hold on to relationships because of our experiences and lack of trust in the people around us."

"When I was first in care I didn't understand or know how to have good/friendly relationships so would be good to have help learning this."

"Christmas [is] lonely, loneliness in general."

Their suggestions for change included:

"We should have more choice in the professionals who work with us; there should be better matching to help find workers we can really open up to and trust."

"[schools are] teaching young people about safe sex rather than healthy loving relationships – [education should] include healthy relationships."

"We should be asked more about who we want and need in our lives, whether that's family or workers."

The last word

One of the responses from children and young people summed up ANV's message to the Children's Minister and Government.

You have the power to transform lives. For children in care and care leavers like me, the system can be the difference between struggling to survive or finding the confidence to thrive. Your decisions can create a future where every child in care feels valued, supported, and capable of achieving their dreams. We are not just statistics. We are future leaders, entrepreneurs, teachers, artists, and innovators—but we can only reach our potential if the system lifts us up instead of holding us back.

Listen to us. Involve us. Care-experienced people know what it's like to navigate this system, and we can help you create real change. Focus on the things that matter—stable homes, mental health support, education, and opportunities to grow into independent adults.

Be bold. Be the minister who doesn't just patch up old policies but creates a legacy of hope and opportunity. If you see us as individuals with endless potential, the system will begin to reflect that.

You could change lives for generations.

You have this opportunity—don't just take it. Run with it.

About us

A National Voice

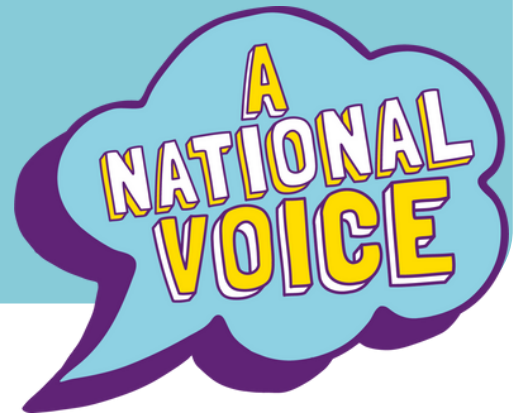
A National Voice is the national council for children in care and care leavers in England. We work to improve the care system through the voices of care experienced young people. We empower children and young people by giving them the skills and support to make real change at both a local and national level.

We also work with care experienced children and young people to overcome issues which we feel are significant, through local and national campaigns, influencing government and creating opportunities for children in care and care leavers to come together in shared spaces.

Mission: To ensure their collective voice is heard nationally to make the care system better.

Over the next three years, our ambassadors want to put ANV on the map by prioritising:

- Building a care experienced community
- Making sure all children in care have good care no matter where they live
- Challenging stigma and promoting positive stories about being in care
- Promoting a better understanding of the reality of being in care
- Strengthening and encouraging youth voice and engagement



Coram Voice

Founded 50 years ago as A Voice of the Child in Care and now part of the Coram group, Coram Voice champions the rights of children by getting young voices heard in decisions that matter to them and working to improve the lives of children in care, care leavers and others who depend upon the help of the state.