

"A home is where you feel safe... you feel part of the family, you're listened to and you have your own space."

"Young people get different things, different support for the same issues."

"Let us be more involved in our reviews."

# A NATIONAL VOICE

## What children and young people wanted to say to the Care Review

"If I was still in a 'normal' family dynamic I'd still be at home right now not in independent living."

"[Care] is like a second family who loves you but that is only if you get a good foster carer."

"A system designed for you would make sure you have the right information."

# Contents

## 2 Collating your views for the Care Review

### 4 Summary

### 5 Who responded

### 6 Support us to grow

Care is...  
Good care  
Family time  
Mental health  
Education  
Home is not a placement  
Preparation for independence

### 14 The best professionals for us

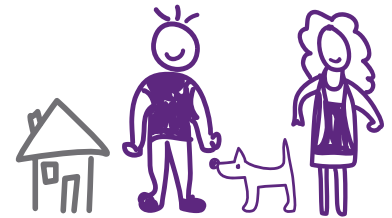
Social workers  
Independent Reviewing Officers and Personal Advisers  
Carers  
Training professionals

## 19 Services designed for children and young people

Treated differently  
Red tape  
Participation  
Language  
Cliff edges in support  
Complaints

## 27 The same support wherever we are

The lottery of care  
Differences in support  
Differences in where you live  
Understanding rights and entitlements



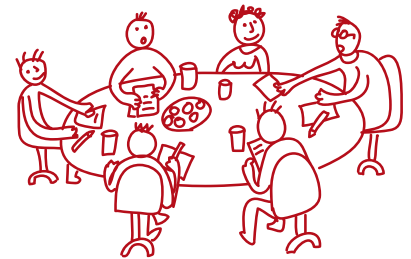
# Collating your views for the Care Review

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care was announced in March 2020 and set up by the government to make sure children and young people in and leaving care get the support they need.

The Independent Review commissioned A National Voice Ambassadors (a group of 24 care experienced young people aged 16-25 from across England) to support them with the review to make sure the voices of more children and young people in care and leaving care are heard.

In early summer 2021, the review team published a report called 'The Case for Change' which highlighted broad areas they have identified as most needing changing in children's social care. Our A National Voice Ambassadors developed workshop packs for children and young people to have their say on these areas.

Workshop packs were sent out to Children in Care Councils and other groups who had expressed an interest. Local Authorities from across the country ran sessions and held conversations with their children and young people.



### The workshop packs included:

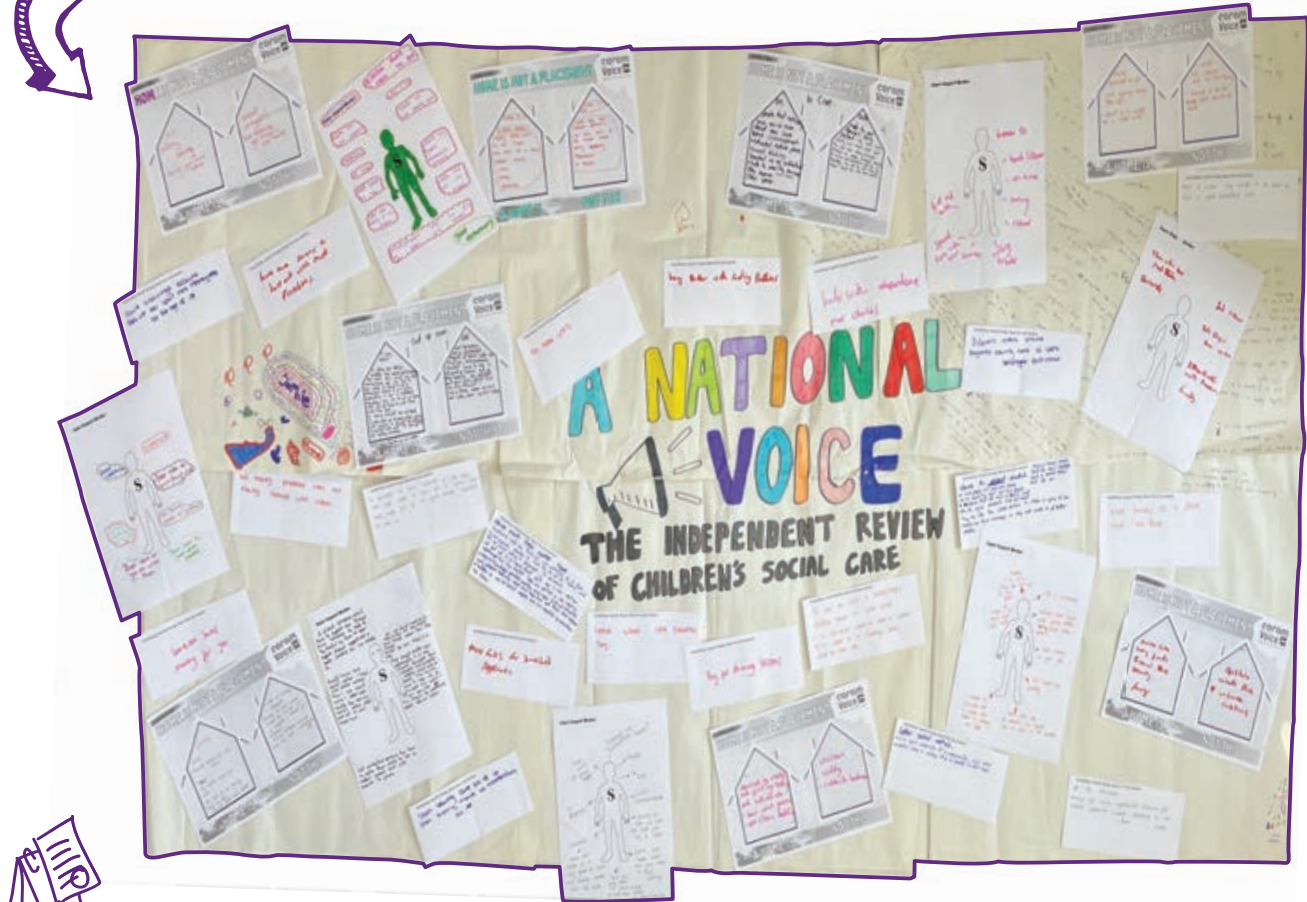
- 6 Words (to describe care)
- Design a Worker
- Cliff Edges
- Change 3 Things
- What Should Care Look Like?
- Home is Not a Placement
- Journey of Care
- Hot Topics: Including Advocacy, Staying Put, IRO's, Language, Education, Employment and Aspirations and Complaints

There was also a separate survey for young people who did not want to take part in group sessions or who were not part of their Children in Care Council but still wanted to have a say.

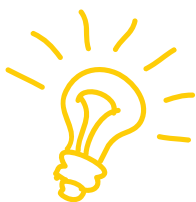
## Spotlight on participation



Hull's Room 42 Project for care leavers' consultation feedback



**THANK YOU!**



We want to say a huge thank you to all the children and young people who have shared their thoughts, feelings and hopes for the future as well as the great staff who have supported them to participate and to have their voices heard.

A group of A National Voice Ambassadors met in August 2020 for a two day residential. On the first day they read all the responses received and split into smaller groups to explore what was mentioned most frequently.

**The group found several themes emerging including:**

- A postcode lottery
- Cliff edges
- Systems that don't work for children and young people
- The importance of positive language

On the second day they prepared short presentations on each theme to share with members of the Independent Review Team.

**This reports summarises what you told us and the ANV presentations.**

# Summary

"It is like a second family who loves you but that is only if you get a good foster carer."

"Counselling provided when put into care."

"Training... about what it's like being in care and why we should be listened to."

"I know my social worker cares because they text me out of hours."

## Support us to grow

Good care is where you felt safe, supported and had fun.

For some of you being in care had been a positive experience and you wouldn't change anything about it.

The right carers were important and you explored what made a 'home', not a 'placement'.

You talked about specific support you wanted to improve, including:

- family time
- mental health support
- education
- preparation for independence

## The best professionals for us

Good relationships with professionals is key to making your care experience good.

Changes made it harder to develop trusting relationships, but people who listen and care are key.

You felt they should have the right training, including on:

- Understanding what makes you, you (LGBTQ+, belief, culture)
- mental health
- listening to young people

## A NATIONAL VOICE

"A home is where you feel safe, it's homely, comfortable, and decorated nice, you feel part of the family, you're listened to and you have your own space."

## What children and young people wanted to say to the Care Review

"If we want to stay with a friend then do the checks and allow us to have some fun and be normal."

## The same support wherever we are

You wanted a clearer and fairer system to remove the postcode lottery of care.

Care often felt like a lottery where, if you were lucky and in care in the right area, you would get support.

You pointed out differences in what was offered to young people in the same local authority, which did not feel fair.

"My brother was 4 years younger than me and he has had a lot more support offered."

## Services designed for us

You wanted services that work for you, that you can understand, rather than ones designed for and by adults.

You felt the care system is designed to meet the needs of adults, local authorities, government (and sometimes computer systems or processes).

Areas of the care system that don't work for you:

- Not enough focus on building good relationships
- Not being able to do the same things as your friends
  - Not being listened to
  - Slow decisions and red tape
- Lack of information about decisions or your rights
  - Poor language used
  - Difficulties with complaints
  - Many cliff edges in support

"A system designed for you would make sure you have the right information."

"A lot of cliff edges seem to be around money"

# Who responded?

## Age

|     |      |       |       |       |       |     |
|-----|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| 0-8 | 8-10 | 10-12 | 12-15 | 16-18 | 18-20 | 21+ |
| 5   | 9    | 19    | 41    | 96    | 42    | 24  |



Responses from

**309**

children and young people

Responses from

**31**

Local authorities

## Gender\* (as they identify)

Male: 92

Female: 135

Non-binary: 3

Prefer not to say: 4

Other: 0

## Special Educational Needs (SEND)\*

Yes: 38

No: 271

## Ethnicity\*

Asian: 13

Black: 3

Mixed: 7

White: 187

Other: 4



Online sessions: 14  
In person sessions: 10

Bath & North Somerset  
Bedfordshire Borough

Bolton

Bradford

Brighton & Hove

Bristol

Central Bedfordshire

Coventry

Cumbria

Derby

Devon

Dudley

Haringey

Holton

Hull

Kent

Medway

Manchester

North Yorkshire

Norfolk

Plymouth

Reading

Rutland

Rotherham

Sandwell

Sheffield

Suffolk

Somerset

South Tyneside

Telford

Worcestershire

\*not all children and young people shared information about gender, ethnicity, age or SEND.



# Spotlight on top things to change



We asked you to identify 3 things to improve care. You had lots of ideas and it was difficult to pick just 3.



Here are the top things:

- **Mental health**, including tackling loneliness and making sure there are services available to you.
- **Training**, for social workers and carers including around mental health, identity and cultural awareness, LGBTQ+, beliefs and religion. Training should include supporting you to understand your rights, entitlements, and why you are in care.
- **Family time**, how often you see your family and how this is valued.
- **A fair care system**, reduce the difference in care offered around the country.
- **Listening and participation**, to be listened to and not judged. To remove stigma and stereotypes. Being in care should be done with you not to you.
- **Social workers**, fewer changes in social workers. Better communication when changes take place and ensuring you are involved in decisions affecting you.
- **Care leaver support**, PAs to support you with life skills to support independence. You think that support shouldn't suddenly end at 25 and there should be support with employment, education and training.
- **Financial support, reducing costs and developing budgeting skills**, better and clearer financial packages for children and young people. Where possible for Local Authorities to reduce costs i.e. travel, council tax and housing costs. For all care leavers to receive budgeting skills.



## Good Care

"[I would change] Nothing to be quite honest as I loved my carers and I was treated as part of their family so I don't have a bad thing to say about being in care."

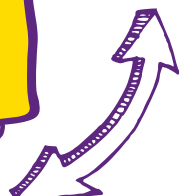
Some of you spoke about the difference foster carers and social workers make to your experience of care.

- You said that you were provided with opportunities you wouldn't have had access to, such as holidays, school trips and educational support.
- Some of you who had left care spoke about being able to go to university and live independently.
- Some of you said that care felt like it was a 'second chance'.
- For others amongst you care felt isolating, lonely and confusing. You wanted to be near family members, friends and places that you knew.



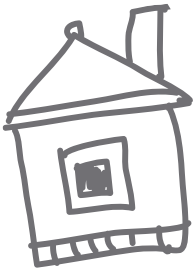
- You felt care should be about supporting children and young people to know who they are, grow and become the best versions of themselves.

"Sometimes it feels like we are made to grow up so fast it's not fair we are children at [the] end [of the] day."



## Family time

You thought that family time was important and you spoke about missing and not seeing your birth family enough.



"Only seeing my nanna 3x per year and my sister much less than I'd like."

"You are excluded from social events when it comes to your family. Especially if your social worker doesn't get back in time with permission."



- You especially talked about being separated from your brothers and sisters.
- You wanted to see each other even when some of you were no longer in care (adopted or back with family).

"Try to keep siblings together where possible or in touch as much as possible. [You] need to be mindful [of the] trauma of separating us all."

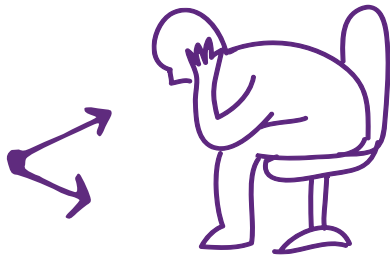
"How easy they can separate siblings and lose contact with them all with no explanation."

"If you return home after going into care, you should be able to continue having contact with your siblings (who are still in care)."



## Mental health

You talked about mental health both in terms of short-term feelings and more long-term problems.



- You shared how you believe social workers and other professionals should have more training and understanding of trauma and the mental health of children and young people.

**“More support with my mental health and PAs trained to recognise mental health and problems.”**

- Some of you spoke about the timing of support being available, saying that whilst in care might not be the appropriate time to talk about your experiences.

**“Should be able to access a therapist not just when thinking about self-harm.”**

**“Counselling [should be] provided when put into care.”**



**“It can be lonely during the harder times, like significant changes, like when you’re first put into foster care. You have just left your family and moving into a place with people you don’t know. Even though I’ve been in care a while, when I think back to that time, it can make those feelings come back and make me feel lonely again.”**

- You shared the difficulties you have had accessing mental health services and you believed that there should be more joined up working and that care experienced young people should automatically receive a service.

**“Mental health and the care system should be together.”**

- Some of you thought mental health could be improved through access to activities and groups.

**“Fund[ing] the 18-25 life centre pass so we can have free access to gym/swimming physical and mental health outcomes”**

## Education

You spoke about how you should be better supported with education including removing stigma and how everyone should have high aspirations for you.

"There seems to be a lack of aspirations for young people by social workers."

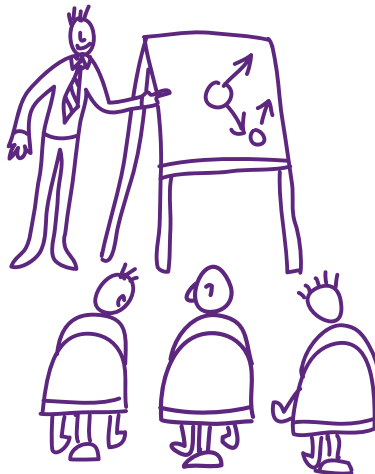


"Being well supported by education establishments means teachers not to make it obvious that you are in care. Social workers not to arrange meetings in class time."

"I don't like it, people treat you differently, like at school teachers will not tell off a child in care because they're in care and they feel that's how children in care behave. They excuse the behaviour and don't like correct them, and don't expect them to do anything."

- Some of you felt that being in care has given you advantages over your friends.

- Others felt that expectations for the future are lower for care experienced young people than for other young people. You stressed that 'high expectations' and 'success' do not necessarily have to mean A-Levels and attending university.



"I have higher hopes than friends, because I know staff and you guys from Voices of Care."

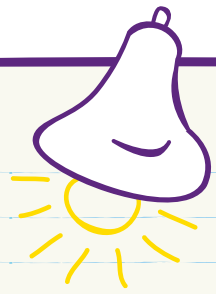


"Sometimes I think I do better than my friends, but I don't have parents to say 'don't worry, it's not all that bad' But when I do achieve things like uni. I can say I did it myself."

- You identified things that have been a positive as a care leaver. This included access to apprenticeships, help with college stuff, grants for setting up home, going to university and job opportunities.

1x1 =

## Spotlight on education



Reading's participation groups Care2Listen, Care2Have Fun, ASPIRE (UASC) and Care Leaver Ambassadors wanted to have their feelings about education heard.





## Preparation for independence

You spoke about how you need more support in preparing for independence.

- Good services helped you manage living independently when you left care with people on hand to give advice and support.

"I think it's a great service overall always there when you need advice and guidance with any issues around living independently such as helping young people understand how to manage their money for a month."

"I had a lot of support when leaving care, from my PA. I found things quite difficult to begin with but I adjusted and I loved living on my own and having my own independence."

- You told us that it's important that information is shared with you about leaving care and what it will be like for you.
- Some of you spoke about the importance of financial management and understanding Universal Credit.
- You said that it's important that you gain skills like cooking, budgeting and living skills before you live independently, so that you can adjust easier.
- Some of you felt that there needed to be more support when you do move into your own home and this might be a time when you spend more time with your PA.
- Some of you felt that workers underestimated the reality of living independently and that social workers and PAs needed to be more realistic and give 'down to earth' explanations.

- Setting up home support was highlighted by many of you.

"I had to move house and rip up carpets to take to a new place. They don't fit."

"Some stuff we get given is cheap and doesn't last."



"You get a lot of young people saying that they have been taught life skills, but I haven't learnt any, I've done it all myself."

- Some of you spoke about your experiences of living semi-independently.

"Semi independence was by far the worst years of my life. I was moved around 15 times in less than two years. This was after social services took my baby when I was 16. I was given no mental health support and I was a broken person. The response was to keep moving me around the county. I don't know how I survived."



- A good relationship means not feeling like **'we are not just another case'** and having workers who take an interest in you and treat you with respect.



**"It's important to have people around you to encourage you and motivate you."**

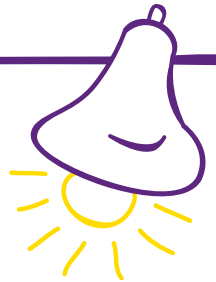
**"A previous social worker was very 'tick boxy' and didn't get to know me personally. She saw me only as her job and made me feel I was not worth her time. She was always late and made me feel worthless"**



## Spotlight on social workers



Dudley's Children in Care Council, Make A Difference (M.A.D.), developed key messages on what they want from their social workers:



**Dear Social Worker, We like it when you...**

**turn up to see us on time** - or let us know if you can't make it or are going to be late

**listen to us carefully,** and clarify/check that you have heard us correctly

**are honest with us** - and only make promises you can keep

**take time to get to know us** - maybe take us out for some food so we can chat and find out more about each other

**show interest in us** - find out what we like to do and support us to find groups and clubs that we can join

**ask us when and where we would like to meet you,** and what we want to talk about

**give us extra support** when we are going through a tough time

**help us when we have a problem** - and please take it seriously

**tell us why we are in care** - when we are ready to know

**text, call or send us a card** on our birthday

**meet us as soon as you know you are working with us** - and say goodbye if you are leaving

**use incentives to reward us** - for achieving agreed targets e.g. keep out of trouble at school

**ask us when and where we would like to meet you,** and what we want to talk about



## IROs & PAs

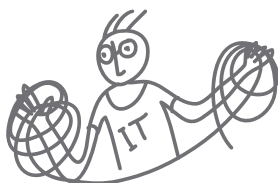
In addition to social workers you said Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), Personal Advisers (PAs), foster carers, teachers and other trusted adults are important.



- Some of you believed that the role of IRO should be more independent by sitting outside the Local Authority.
- You felt that different professionals needed to work well together.



## Spotlight on communication



“Being in care, communication can be a difficult thing. I have multiple experiences [of] when one of my workers have been absent and I haven’t been informed despite my other workers trying to contact them and/or their team/out of hours services. This is problematic because when things need to be acted upon urgently and we can’t reach anyone, what can we do? I haven’t had to directly contact them myself yet because for one I know it’s rare they’ll see my email and two because I find that stuff stressful. So when it comes to having to do it independently, how can I not get stressed when I’ve not been informed?”

There [are] also issues [with] communication between social workers and PAs. When I meet my PA I have to inform her of what is going on myself, she doesn’t know anything.

For example my education plan or my living arrangements plan, I had to update her on it.

And because of lack of communication there is confusion.”

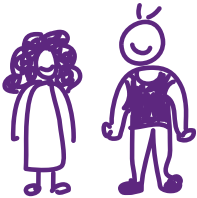


## Carers

Foster carers are a key part of making sure where you live is right for you. Your responses reflected good experiences with foster carers as well as things that should be improved.

"I had a great relationship with my carers and really trusted them. They were amazing to me and helped me so much."

"Children need to find the right carers for them. Kids need to go to a family where they feel loved and that they actually matter."



- How foster carers are recruited, trained and supported were all mentioned. Some of you felt that foster carers shouldn't be paid.



"Do not run it like a business."

"Foster carers shouldn't get paid, they should love and treat foster children the same as they do their birth children."

"Being reminded that foster caring is a job '[they're] paid to look after you, you're not family'."



- Some of you thought that there should be a register of foster carers, like there are for social workers, and that if they aren't suitable they can be taken off the list.

- You wanted to have choice in the carer you lived with.

"My ideal foster carers would be people who are not interested in the money, but interested in helping and supporting the young people not the money."

"I think there should be options for carers e.g. meet a couple of different foster carers and see which you prefer."



## Training professionals

You highlighted the need for professionals in your life, like foster carers and social workers, to be trained to best support you.

“Staff need to be provided with more training. There cannot be too much training.”

“Training for staff and services that is designed and delivered by children and young people about what it’s like being in care and why we should be listened to.”

- This included training in dealing with the bad things that may have happened to you in the past and mental health.

“Better training for foster carers especially around being trauma informed.”

- You also wanted them to receive training in understanding the things that make you, you.

“More training for foster carers to understand young people this generation for example LGBTQ+.”

# Services designed for children and young people


You wanted services that work for you, that you can understand, rather than ones designed for and by adults.

You felt the care system is designed to meet the needs of the adults, local authorities, government (and sometimes computer systems or processes). Areas of the care system that don't work for you include: not enough focus on building good relationships; not being able to do the same things as your friends; not being listened to; slow decisions and red tape; lack of information about decisions or your rights; poor language used; difficulties with complaints; many cliff edges in support.



"[Social care is a] minefield to navigate - offers, support, roles and [to] justify why you need help and support stressful."

- You said that people in the system didn't have time to develop relationships with you, instead many social workers were time poor and overstretched and often changed too much.





"Allows us time, sometimes a session does go over but you're not mad or kicking us out the door, you allow that extra time."



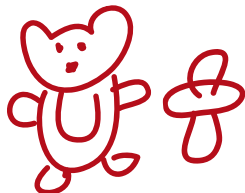
## Treated differently

You spoke about not wanting to be treated differently because you are in care. You want to do 'normal things' and reach 'normal milestones'.


- 
- Some of you spoke about it being a natural part of childhood to push boundaries and want to experience independence.



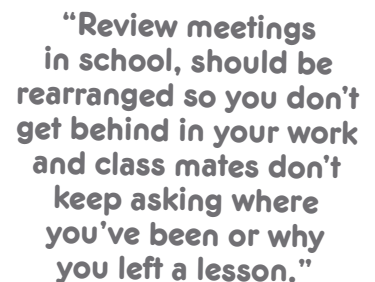
"Safeguarding isn't the same for children as it should be for young people or young adults."



- There's lots of meetings you go to and sometimes you receive mixed messages. You are sometimes treated as a child yet given adult sized things to do.
- You felt that meetings were held at times and in places that didn't work for you (e.g. during school hours).



"If you're a care leaver and you go onto have a child of your own you shouldn't be judged about your past and that you were in care."



"Review meetings in school, should be rearranged so you don't get behind in your work and class mates don't keep asking where you've been or why you left a lesson."



- Some of you talked about how the system automatically assesses your parenting when you are care experienced, which would not happen for other young parents.

## Red tape

There were many rules and paperwork that stopped you from having the same experiences as other children and young people.

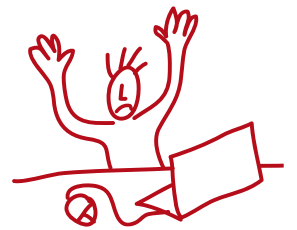
- Some of you felt that foster carers should have more say in your care and make some decisions without the permission of social workers i.e. sleepovers, haircuts, school trips and your access to technology.

“Grandparents – discussion around how they look after you, feed you, make sure you are ok, give you pocket money etc.”



“When I was younger it was the red tape around what I could and couldn't do and who was my parent for example piercings and trips away just things around freedom. I felt isolated as a child in care.”

- Some of you talked about foster carers having to write up stuff about you or that when your family are your carers they still have to follow processes that are not there in other families.



## Spotlight on red tape

Our ANV Ambassadors explored your comments in ‘what care should look like?’ and saw that you felt there was a lot of ‘red tape’ around common activities like visiting friends, school trips and haircuts. Here ANV Ambassadors take ‘sleepovers’ to illustrate the red tape in the system and what you think could be done to solve it.



## Participation

You told us about the importance of being listened to, both around your care but also through groups like your Children in Care Council so that social workers and managers understand your needs and you can get the best support and services for you.

"Listen to me, let me come to my meeting, let me hear what you are saying about me."

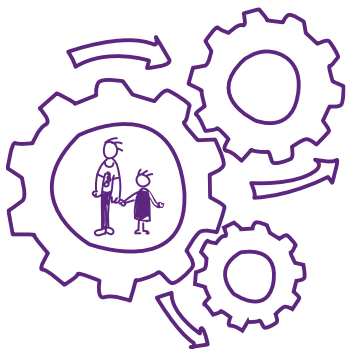
- You said that you want more opportunities to have your say in your care and to hear what professionals are saying about you in meetings.

"Should be able to choose who comes to our review and who can read our information taken in the reviews."

- You believe that children and young people should have support in order to have their voice heard.

"Advocates help people understand and use their voices."

"Actually have my thoughts and feelings listened to."



- Some of you spoke about being involved in Children in Care Councils and Care Leaver Forums. You believe that it's important that services involve you, so that services can meet your needs.
- Some of you spoke about the importance of recognition for your involvement in groups through vouchers, payment and how you have developed skills.
- You said that it was also a good opportunity to meet others with care experience and that Local Authorities should make sure that everyone has the opportunity to be involved.

"All LAs should have an easy to access Children in Care Council and have details available online."

"If you join groups you can be involved in consultations and try and make a positive change to social care provided they listen and take on board feedback."

"Chance of earn awards for own personal development within participation or CEC group and that shows we have made changes and turned things around within our life - not everyone gets that opportunity, depends on the worker."



## Language

You identified that lots of words that professionals use are not child or youth friendly. Some words can feel like you are “getting labelled”.

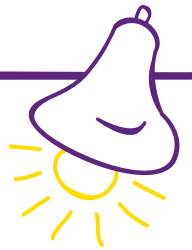
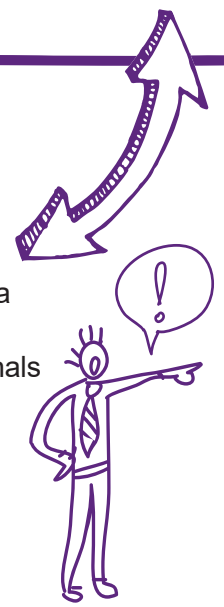
- You felt that in meetings you hear words that you should never hear or you were talked about in a way that didn't give the right picture of you or your family.
- You said that social workers need to think more about the way they write records because one day you may read them.
- When you accessed records there were often delays and too much redaction or too many acronyms used.
- Some of you spoke about how language has a long term impact, both positive and negative. You didn't like words such as 'child in care', 'placement', 'contact'. You would prefer clear, simple and child-friendly language.

“Positive language - it makes the young person feel valued and understood and want to engage and interact more.”

- You felt words can create stigma and stereotypes and makes you feel less of a person. Professionals should think about the words they use in meetings and how they are recorded.

“Being in care means you are treated differently to a normal person. You are looked upon deprived and poor.”

“Listen to me, let me come to my meeting, let me hear what you are saying about me.”



## Spotlight on language

Kent's Children in Care Councils, Super Council, OCYPC & YAC identified changes in language they would like.

### Contact

“Contact is an awkward word.”  
 “It is cold and detached.”  
 “Younger children don't use this word...it has multiple meanings.”

#### Use:

**Family Time, Seeing Family, Family Visit, Seeing mum / dad / sisters / brothers (not siblings!)**

### Placement

“It makes me feel like an object being put somewhere.”  
 “It doesn't make me feel like I'm going to be part of the family...it's cold and not loving.”

#### Use:

**Where I live, Home, My House**

### L.A.C.

“L.A.C makes it seems like you are lacking knowledge or need to be looked after.”  
 “It makes it sound like you're stupid or missing something.”

#### Use:

**Child in Care, Young Person**

### Respite

“It sounds like carers don't like you; you've worn them out and they can't cope.”  
 “It's something wanted or needed but doesn't sound positive.”  
 “(it's like) the foster carers need a break from you.”

#### Use:

**Holiday, Break, Short Break, Mini Get Away**

### Care Leaver / Leaving Care

“It makes it sound like no one cares about you any more.”  
 “(it seems like they're saying) our work here is done.”

#### Use:

**Care Experienced Adult, Next Steps, Continuing Care / Support, Moving On**

### Peers

“I've never heard that word.”  
 “It sounds too professional.”

#### Use:

**Friends, Mates, Friendship Group**

## Cliff edges in support

As the care system isn't designed with children and young people you described many 'cliff edges' in the care you receive. This can be where services don't work together or there is a sudden cut off in support.

- Sometimes things change when you turn a certain age or you don't tick certain boxes.

"They put me in independent living when I turned 18 and then told me I didn't need social services anymore. I was so afraid."

"[There should be a] duty PA worker that will take calls from someone signed off and help with our issue as they don't at the moment and when you have nobody to ask it's heart breaking, reminds us we are alone and not wanted."



- You talked about how you are not always supported to deal with changes.

"A lot of cliff edges seem to be around money."

"Care leavers should always get help when they need it. I'm always going to be a care leaver, it doesn't just disappear when I turn 25."

"When social workers have to change there should be a good reason why, we need a proper explanation as we have lots of things going on and worry about things."

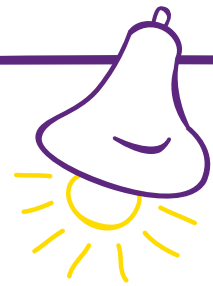


- You spoke about how cliff edges could be avoided with early planning and support.

"Time to prepare about leaving/change."

"Being in care was life changing. Every aspect of my life is still affected by it. I don't think there is enough time to process all the trauma before you leave care and all the stress and headaches come back."

## Spotlight on cliff edges



An insight into the cliff edge of a 24-year-old care experienced person.



"A cliff edge is often something used to describe the upcoming cut off point for a care experienced person. It's often used to describe key points in our lives when we lose all our support - if that's financial, housing or anything else our corporate parents offer us - it's scary and often affects the key points in our lives. Such as turning 18, 21 or even 24.



I had never experienced this cliff edge until recently. This is because I was lucky and decided I wanted to explore university at 21, this meant my Local Authority had to support me through this, and because I applied before hitting 21, they had to support me. During my time at university, I had a great deal of support, and I can't fault them on that at all. Without the support they offered me, I would have struggled deeply. But this changed drastically once I had finished university. This is arguably the most important time I would have needed support as I no longer get my student loan, I was out of work (due to Covid and just finishing my degree) and needed to move out of my student home before the end of July.



When it came to asking for help, but my local authority said they couldn't help me as I was no longer a student, and they could only send me a single food voucher. This means they didn't help me move, they didn't offer to be my guarantor for the new house I was moving too, and I wasn't able to access the rest of my home grant. I was, in a nutshell, left to fend for myself and move out weeks after finishing university with nothing but a £30 food voucher to last me until the end of August at least. I was on the cliff edge for the first time. If it wasn't for my loved ones, I wouldn't have moved out, and I most definitely wouldn't have made it to September.

Up to this stage I assumed I was still an open case; I wasn't 25 yet and I had told them I needed support for the next few months while I found my feet. This changed in a single text that said due to me finishing university, all my support has to cease, and my case has to be closed. So, all the support I've had in the last 14 years was gone, in a single text message. I wasn't given any information of where I can get support if needed, I wasn't told "congratulations for getting a first" or even given a letter to explain why my case has to close. I was cut off in a message that would have taken them 30 seconds to write.



This is when I realised, I wasn't just on the cliff edge, I'd now fallen off it and I had no way on how to get back up to the top of the cliff, as I was cut off from the bungee rope attached to me."



## Complaints

You did not always know where to turn when something wasn't right with your care. Many of you didn't know how to complain or about advocacy and how to access it.



### Spotlight on complaints



**Suggestion from ANV Ambassadors on how to improve complaints and access to advocacy.**

Most young people do not understand about advocates and how they can support them to get their voice heard. I think Local Authorities should encourage young people to come forward to voice any concerns through an advocacy service if the young person needs support. I feel by not informing young people that advocacy exists, is failing to provide young people's rights.

It should be an opt-out service not an opt-in service, this way we have automatic access to advocacy. You should be able to join any advocacy provider that you feel comfortable with.



**The complaints system** is made to work around social work professionals and does not have the young person who needs to use it at its heart. This system is not transparent, too long and complex. Too often the same issues are being raised through complaints, but there are no changes in practice, policies or the system.

**At ANV, we propose an effective 2 stage complaints procedure which must be a simple and thorough process that works for young people.**

#### Stage 1

The investigation must start from the same working day that the complaint is received. At this stage, a team manager who works for the council should be appointed as the investigating officer. The manager must not have had any involvement or knowledge of the case. For all complaints, an advocate must be appointed to ensure the young person's views are heard and this system is a smooth process.

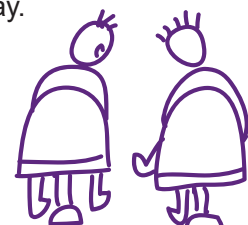
This stage must be completed within 10 working days. If the investigating officer requires more time, then an additional 5 working days can be given as long as the complainant and their advocate have been informed. The response must be given on the last working day of the complaint. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response or the local authority have not responded within 15 working days, the complainant has the right to go to stage 2.

**If the complainant remains unsatisfied with stage 2 or if there are any concerns about whether the complaint was conducted independently in line with timescales then a complaint can be made to the local government and social care ombudsman. (LGO)**

#### Stage 2

The local authority have 3 working days from when the complainant asks to go to stage 2 to appoint an investigating officer who is independent and does not work for the local authority. It would be the role of the complainant and the advocate to have in writing what they are unhappy with and what outcomes they are looking for.

This stage must be completed within 15 working days. If the investigating officer requires more time, then an additional 10 working days can be given as long as the complainant and their advocate have been informed. The independent investigating officer will produce a report and what outcomes they think are appropriate. The Deputy Director of the service must produce a summary report highlighting what actions are going to be taken. The full stage 2 response must be with the complainant on the last working day.



## Spotlight on complaints (continued)



### Young people's thoughts:

"As a young person, I found the process very intimidating at stage 3 with a panel of randomers. There was lots of people there and I felt like I was being investigated or that I had done something wrong."

"Stage 3 is unnecessary and causes additional stress to young people. It doesn't investigate the complaint and has little value to the process. This stage should be removed. If complainants remain unhappy after this stage, then they can approach the ombudsman."

### We believe that:

- All 'children's complaints' that are made to local authorities should be made public. The ombudsman makes their complaints public.
- All decisions of complaints should be shared with Ofsted. This ensures there is transparency and accountability.
- All children's complaints should be reviewed nationally so common problems and themes can be identified and changes put in place to resolve them.
- Local Authorities should be assessed and compared on how quickly they resolve a complaint to the satisfaction of the young person. In each Council, children's complaints should be reviewed often to see how changes can be made within the service.



- Some of you suggested that advocacy should be an opt-out service so that all young people know about it.

"I would change the way advocacy works. It needs to be an opt-out service rather than an opt-in. You shouldn't just have the option to use one service that your local authority is signed up to. You should be able to use any provider."



- You felt that complaints processes were unclear, too long, not designed for young people and not transparent.

"We don't feel comfortable in complaining."

- You suggested that local authorities need to change their approach to complaints to make it more youth-friendly.



"Change the way they approach young people. A system designed for you would make sure you have the right information."



















"Make sure young people know what they are entitled to and how the care system works."

# The same support wherever we are

You wanted a clearer and fairer system to remove the postcode lottery of care. Care often felt like a lottery where, if you were lucky and in care in the right area, you would get support. You pointed out differences in what was offered to young people in the same local authority, which did not feel fair.

"I would end the postcode lottery and bring a formula rate like minimum wage, how much young people should get and it should be reviewed annually. Currently allowances have not changed since I came into care. However minimum wage has gone up. Clothing of £50 a month is not enough"

## POSTCODE LOTTERY

|  |  |   |  |
|--|--|---|--|
| <b>WiFi</b><br>         | <b>Pocket Money</b><br>          | <b>Tech</b><br>            | <b>Home</b><br>                         |
| <b>PA Support</b><br>   | <b>University</b><br>            | <b>Driving Lessons</b><br> | <b>Grants</b><br>                       |
| <b>Foster Care</b><br>  | <b>Clothing</b><br>             | <b>Health</b><br>         | <b>Social Workers</b><br>              |
| <b>Residential</b><br> | <b>Living out of county</b><br> | <b>Participation</b><br>  | <b>Regulated</b><br>                  |
|  |  | <b>Unregulated</b><br>   | <b>Education &amp; Employment</b><br> |

Scratch above to reveal your outcome

## Differences in where you live

- These differences included differences in pocket money, clothing allowances and savings, as well as, leaving care allowances, driving lessons, university support and setting up home grants.
- Other differences concentrated on access to educational support, wifi and technology and housing.

"Tell us what we are entitled to for future, like if we go to college or uni what extra help can we get from social services."

"Make sure we get what we are entitled to."

## Differences in support

- The differences in experiences depending on where you lived, residential or foster care, regulated or unregulated care, were all highlighted.

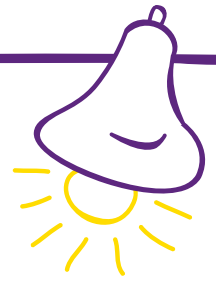
"Allowances changed from foster to children's homes."

- Some of you talked about not being able to or even knowing about options of 'staying put' with foster carers after you turned 18.

## Spotlight on staying put



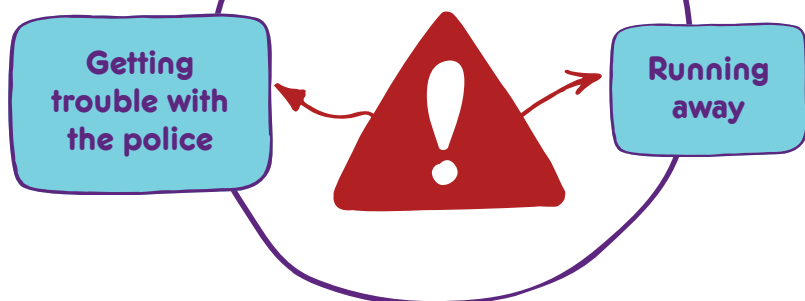
Our ANV ambassadors explored the reasons why young people and foster carers might not want to enter 'staying put' agreements.



What are some of the things that stop young people from staying put?



What are some of the things that stop foster carers from staying put?



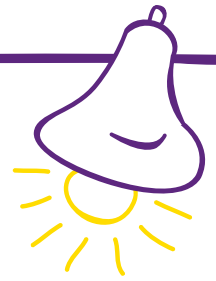
## Understanding rights and entitlements

- Some of you spoke about the different support you had from different social workers and PAs.
- You said that knowing what you are entitled to would make the system fairer. Many of you commented on how you often didn't have enough information about your rights or the support you could access.



"Clearer and across the board care offer so we all get the same, no special treatment and for everyone to know the offer - all staff - carers and most of all us."

## Spotlight on the lottery of care



We were born on the same day, have similar trauma that led us into care by the same local authority, so why when we went into care did our journey become so different? There is a post code lottery, but there can also be a lottery in the support children and young people receive within the same local authority - shown by the experiences of these twin sisters.

**Twin 1**

### POSTCODE LOTTERY

|                        |                                       |                                  |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Born<br><b>10.12am</b> | <b>5</b><br>placements                | <b>3</b><br>holidays             |
| <b>£260</b><br>ISA     | <b>£1000</b><br>leaving<br>care grant | <b>5</b><br>personal<br>advisors |
| Passport               | Laptop<br>at age<br><b>14</b>         | Residential<br>care              |

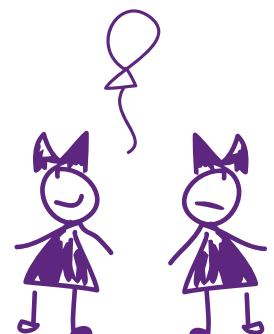
Scratch above to reveal your outcome

**Twin 2**

### POSTCODE LOTTERY

|                        |                                       |   |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Born<br><b>10.13am</b> | <b>49</b><br>placements               | <b>0</b><br>holidays                        |
| <b>£1200</b><br>ISA    | <b>£2000</b><br>leaving<br>care grant | <b>1</b><br>personal<br>advisors            |
| No<br>Passport         | Laptop<br>at age<br><b>21</b>         | Mix of<br>residential<br>and foster<br>care |

Scratch above to reveal your outcome



## About ANV

**A National Voice** is the 'National Children in Care Council' for children in care and care leavers aged 11-26, who are passionate about how the care system works and how it affects those within it.

We work to improve the care system through the voices of care experienced young people. We will empower children and young people by giving them the skills and support to make real change at both a local and national level.

Key to A National Voice is the 'A National Voice Ambassadors Group', which is a core group of young people aged 16-26 recruited annually from across the country, to represent each region and bridge the gap between local and national campaigns.

To get involved in future work by ANV or find out more email [anv@coramvoice.org.uk](mailto:anv@coramvoice.org.uk) or go to [www.coramvoice.org.uk/anv](http://www.coramvoice.org.uk/anv)



## The independent review of children's social care

**The Independent Review of Children's Social Care** is a review of the whole of the children's social care system, chaired by Josh MacAlister. It has been asked to come up with a set of recommendations for the Government by next spring.

The review aims to identify the problems within children's social care and think about ways to make things better for the future.

The question at the heart of the review is: "How do we ensure children grow up in loving, stable and safe families and, where that is not possible, care provides the same foundations?"

The review team prioritised listening to those with lived experience of care from the beginning and have run hundreds of events and engagement sessions, hearing from thousands of people with lived experience of children's social care and professionals.

In June 2021, the review published the Case for Change – a report setting out early thinking on the biggest challenges within the children's social care system – and invited people to feedback, receiving more than 300 formal responses and lots of other informal feedback.

The ideas and suggestions from care experienced people, including this report from Coram Voice's ANV, are being used by the review team to better understand the issues within the care system and to help the team create better recommendations for a future care system.

The Care Review team's website is <http://www.childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/> and their email address is [Review.CHILDRENSSOCIALCARE@education.gov.uk](mailto:Review.CHILDRENSSOCIALCARE@education.gov.uk) which can be used to ask questions or share ideas.