

Young people living in care:

A follow-up event on prospective  
recommendations

Go Ape, Delamere Forest December 2009



## Introduction

### Background

In August 2009 an event took place to bring together young people living in care aged 12-18, to discuss in a fun and informal way how the care system impacts on their lives. Following on from the event, Members from the 'Every Child Matters Select Panel' and Council Officers came up with a list of possible suggestions that could help tackle a number of issues.

In October 2009 a follow-up event with the young people took place at Delamere Forest for them to:

- Look at what issues are most important to them
- Develop their own recommendations of what changes they would like to see in relation to living in care
- Discuss the potential recommendations that Member and Officers had put forward

This report outlines the views of the young people expressed at the follow-up event.

## Summary of Key Recommendations

### **Young people living in foster care would like...**

- A place for older children to meet family such as a coffee shop.
- Regular updates on what is happening with their case.
- A permanent schedule setup in a 'round table' discussion to support seeing family members.
- Young people not to be moved from their school when possible.
- To develop a dedicated website for young people living in care.
- A new leaving care handbook.
- Life skills workshops e.g. managing money.
- Free leisure passes for young people living in care.
- Involvement in planning how pocket money and entitlements are spent.
- Involvement in decisions regarding changing schools.
- A hand over period with social workers.
- All young people living in care to have their case re-reviewed.
- To meet potential carers a number of times and for it to be an active meeting so that they can do an activity such as bowling.
- To have a trial period with foster carers.
- Spot checks carried out on foster homes.
- To change social workers less often (and if do not like social worker to have a chance of changing to a different one).
- Young people who are not from a smoking environment not to be placed in a foster home with smokers.
- Foster carers not to go through their room or to open their mail.
- To be matched to foster families.
- Foster carers to have more guidelines for consistency across different carers.
- To complete a feedback form at review meetings so that the review officer can ring and talk to the young person about anything necessary afterwards.
- Workshops for carers to meet and share experiences.

### **Young people living in a care home would like...**

- To see 'leaving care' workers more often to help them view future places to live.
- To carry out qualifications such as first aid and food hygiene.
- Regular contact with family support workers.
- To have extra funding available to them when they leave care so worry less about money.
- An annual leaving care event for young people, with leaving care workers, Connexions and those who have left care.
- To change the care home's 'Staff Group Meeting' so that young people can attend.
- To be treated the same as young people living in foster care e.g. pocket money.
- To sit on recruitment panels for managers and social workers.
- To have a choice of where to live.
- To have a key to the door in the care home as many doors are kept locked.
- To be involved in how funds are spent.
- More influence in decisions that take place in the home including how the care home looks, activities, sanctions, rules etc.
- Sanctions in the care home to be reviewed.

- Young people in care to interview other young people in care to find out how they are finding it.
- To be involved in training social workers and foster carers.
- A review of what private information care home staff need to know about the young people.
- An appropriate number of care home staff to young people as may be too many staff.
- Care home staff not to be rotated as preference for continuity.
- In special circumstances, staff to work past 11pm.
- To have more say in their care plan and help to make decisions.
- The Chief Executive of Cheshire West and Chester to visit the young people in the care home.
- Room checks to take place when the young person is there.
- To be involved in reviewing policies in the care home.

### **All the young people would like...**

- A review of when appropriate to carry out CRB and safety checks.
- A DVD about semi-independent and independent living to bring to life issues around leaving care and hearing others' experiences. This could be packed with a new leaving care handbook.
- Paid and unpaid work experience to help prepare for future jobs.
- To be involved in putting together appropriate sanctions and rules.
- To receive a birthday card from the Director and social workers.
- A review on what can and can not have in their own room.
- A choice of when review meetings take place, as those not in school would like them during the day and those in school would like them during the evening or weekend.
- New review documents designed.
- Work shadowing schemes.

## The young people told us that they would like to have more support and information

### Issues of most concern

The young people were most concerned about leaving care, particularly those living in the care home who were older and would be leaving care soon. The girls living in foster care, despite being younger, were also concerned about this and would like information given to them gradually from a young age.

The young people were also concerned about understanding the care system including their rights, entitlements, how it works and care contracts. The boys living in foster care were most concerned with issues around living in care including support with seeing family members, negative feelings and settling into their new home.

### Key recommendations

Young people living in foster care would like...

- To have a place for older children to meet family, such as a coffee shop, as the family centre is not considered appropriate (added by young people).
- Regular updates on what is happening with their case so they know where family matters are up to (added by young people).
- A permanent schedule setup in a 'round table' discussion to support seeing family members (added by young people).
- Paid and unpaid work experience schemes to help young people decide what they might like to do in the future.
- Exam preparation lessons at a younger age.
- Work shadowing schemes with supervision, as at times health and safety procedures has prevented this from happening.
- Young people not to be moved from their school whenever possible.
- A dedicated website for young people living in care developed by young people.
- A new leaving care handbook. This is needed at a younger age and needs to be simple and clear.
- Life skills workshops e.g. managing money. Made active where possible.

Young people living in a care home would like...

- To see 'leaving care' workers more often. Leaving care workers provide information about what happens next and show them houses and places to live (added by young people).
- To carry out qualifications such as fire awareness, first aid, food hygiene and care work to boost their CV (added by young people).
- There to always be people to talk to, particularly family support workers. They would like face-to-face regular contact with family support workers with meetings planned every 1 to 2 weeks.

- More funding to be available when leave care to ensure young people have enough money to manage. However, it should be ensured that funding and benefits do not make it beneficial to stay unemployed (added by young people).
- Paid and unpaid work experience to help prepare for future jobs.
- An annual leaving care event for young people to meet other young people and get information from leaving care workers, Connexions and those who have left care in the last 12 months (added by young people).

Also...

- All groups like the idea of a DVD about semi-independent and independent living to bring to life issues around leaving care and hearing others experiences. Some young people do not like reading but thought this could be packed with a new leaving care handbook.
- Health checks for young people are already in place but were felt to be important.
- The current newsletter 'Who Cares' is considered boring, long, out of date and not relevant. Written information was not a preferred method of communication.
- Information about certain topics, though important, was already received from school or Connexions such as bullying, careers advice, sex and relationships, drugs and alcohol, healthy eating, what's on in the local area and exam preparation.

## The young people told us they would like to be involved in decisions and have more choice

### Issues of most concern

All groups wanted to be more involved in decisions about whom they lived with and where they are placed. Having more choice over what happens at the age of leaving care was a key issue, particularly for those older and living in a care home.

### Key recommendations

Young people living in foster care would like...

- Free leisure passes for young people living in care, particularly for a gym.
- To be involved in putting together appropriate sanctions and rules.
- To be involved in planning how pocket money and entitlements are spent.
- To be involved in all decisions regarding changing schools.
- A hand over period with social workers. For a period of time, the 'old' and 'new' social worker should work together with the young person (added by young people).
- All young people living in care to have their case re-reviewed so that they all have a second chance of going back home. If it is re-reviewed the young people must have an input.
- To meet potential carers a number of times and it to be an active meeting so that they go out and do an activity such as go to a park or go bowling. Also they would like the option of a trial period (added by young people).

Young people living in a care home would like...

- To attend the 'Staff Group Meeting'. Currently staff ask young people if there is anything they would like to put forward for the meeting and later receive the minutes. If the young people could attend they could influence decisions being made (added by young people).
- To be treated the same as those living in foster care. They want the 'right to be cared for' and 'right to stay put' to apply to them too and to get the same pocket money and entitlements (added by young people).
- Young people to sit on recruitment panels for permanent managers and social workers. This would not only let young people be involved in who gets a job but allow them to get interview experience.
- Would like a choice of where to live and to have a key to the door in the care home, as many doors are kept locked (added by young people).
- To be involved in how funds are spent.
- To have more influence on decisions that take place in the care home including how the care home looks, activities, sanctions, rules, food and procedures.

## The young people told us they want to live in a nice environment

### Issues of most concern

All of the young people want to live in a comfortable home with people that they like. They want to have their privacy and independence respected. Those living in a care home particularly stressed the need to make care homes comfortable and homely.

### Key recommendations

Young people living in foster care would like...

- Spot checks and thorough inspections carried out on foster homes.
- Social workers to change less often (also if do not like social worker should have chance of changing social worker).
- If the young people are not from a smoking environment they should not be placed in a foster home with smokers.
- Foster carers not to go through the young persons room.
- Foster carers not to open the young person's mail.
- Young people to have their own room.
- The young person to be matched to foster families and treated as part of that family.

Young people living in a care home would like...

- A review of sanctions in the care home.
- Young people in care to interview other young people in care about how they are finding it.

- To be involved in training social workers, health workers and foster carers in communicating with looked after children.
- A review of what private information care home staff need to know about the young people.
- An appropriate number of care home staff in the home to the number of young people, as there may be too many staff members.
- Care home staff not to be rotated as young people prefer continuity of staff.

Also...

- The young people would like to receive a birthday card from the Director and social workers.
- Educational and other achievements are already marked, and this is important to the young people.

## The young people told us they want less restrictions

### **Issues of most concern: less restrictions**

All the young people stressed the importance of wanting to be treated like other young people their age in regards to their possessions, friends and restrictions.

### **Key recommendations: less restrictions**

Young people living in foster care would like...

- A review on the policy about what they can and can not have in their own room.
- Foster carers to have more guidelines for consistency across carers, for example on times that young people have to go to bed, on pocket money and curfews (added by young people).
- A feedback form at review meetings so that the review officer can call the young person after it to answer any issues they found confusing or questions they want answering.
- A review of when it is appropriate to carry out CRB and safety checks.
- Workshops or an event for carers to meet, share experiences and receive information.

Young people living in a care home would like...

- In special circumstances staff to work past 11pm.
- To have more say in their care plan (added by young people).
- The Chief Executive of Cheshire West and Chester to visit the care home (added by young people).
- A review of when it is appropriate to carry out CRB and safety checks. The young people want to be sure staff are CRB checked but would like to be able to have friends stay over and for them to be allowed in the centre vehicle.
- A review on the policy about what they can and can not have in their own room.

- Room checks to take place only when the young person is there and not when they are out (added by young people).
- To be involved in reviewing policies in the care home.

Also...

- The young people thought there should be a choice of when they have review meetings as those not in school would like them during the day and those in school would like them during the evening or a weekend. Review meetings were considered boring, confusing and lacking in the young person's involvement. The young people would like to see new review documents designed.