

a national voice

presents



the report



What is A National Voice?

A National Voice is the only national organisation run by and for young people from care. We provide a national platform to hear the voices of young people who are in or leaving care. Our aim is to make positive changes within the care system. We have 4 paid workers who are all care-experienced. A National Voice is almost four years old and currently has offices in London and Manchester.

A National Voice is a young person led organisation. The work we do is guided by our Management Committee, which is made up of care-experienced young people from all over England. We also have active groups of young people in the North West and South East who make up Regional Forums which provide a regional platform for the voices of young people. Both of these regions have a full time Regional Development Worker and it is our aim to find funding for 6 more Regional workers across England.

The work of A National Voice is varied, and includes consultation with young people, organising regional and national events for young people and promoting a positive image of young people from care. We also work alongside many Voluntary Organisations and Local Authorities to improve the care system, raise awareness and promote the rights of young people in and leaving care.

What is Amplify?

The Amplify event took place at Leicester University during the weekend of 17th and 18th August 2002. The aim of the event was to provide an opportunity for 150 young people aged between 13–21 to come together, have fun and share experiences. A National Voice staff team along with young people from the Management Committee and both the North West and South East forums planned the event. We recruited about 40 workers to help us run the event. Big thanks to everyone who made Amplify possible, and to over 50 Local Authorities who supported the event. Even bigger thanks to all of the young people who travelled miles to Amplify from all over England.

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The Foster Care Campaign



The word 'amplify' is written in a bold, blue, lowercase font. The letters are stylized with a textured, almost feathered or brush-stroke effect, particularly on the 'y' and 'l'.

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Introduction

Amplify was a wildly ambitious event. The idea was to organise the largest gathering of care-experienced young people there had ever been. It was held on the 17th and 18th August 2002 at Leicester University Halls of Residence. The plan was to give young people the opportunity to come together, to take part in a range of activities and consultations and to be empowered by the strength of numbers.

At the outset the staff and young people of A National Voice had no idea of the monster we were letting free. Nothing on this scale had been tried before so we had no idea of the numbers of young people who would want to attend, or whether social services departments would be prepared to foot the £160 bill per person. Until two weeks before August 17th it looked as though the event would be a financial disaster. The venue was booked and expenditure committed but booking numbers hadn't even gone in to double figures after weeks of mailing and phoning.

The fact that by late on Friday, August 16th 151 young people were expected to descend on Leicester is due to sheer hard work and the intervention of Mike Leadbetter. Mike was the Director of Social Services in Essex and President of the Association of Directors of Social Services who cajoled his fellow Directors throughout England into selling the event to young people.

The programme was simple. On Saturday a whole range of workshops from drumming and didgeridoo playing to media training via sculpture, DIY, wheelchair basketball and many others were on offer. We also had the facilities of a computer survey about care. The Sunday morning was for consultation, a chance for young people to tell us what they think of life, the care system and everything. Alongside all this was an inspirational opening from the management committee and regional forums of A National Voice and poet Lemn Sissay. In the evening we held a party which only proved that in the world of music it is impossible to please even a small minority at any time.

This report concentrates on the information young people gave us in the computer survey and the Sunday morning consultation. We hope it contributes to the growing knowledge of what young people think about being in care. If this is as far as it goes then we will have failed. If you do have any influence please read what young people have to say and act on it.

It is impossible here to thank everyone who helped with Amplify by name. You are too many and varied. So, if you did give us help before the event or even gave up your weekend to help us, consider yourself thanked. An extra special thanks goes to all those people who came, put up with some of the more chaotic bits and by and large seemed to be having a good time. To those of you who ask when the next one is going to be, the answer is still a long way off.



Group Consultation

The 151 young people at Amplify met in groups for two hours on the Sunday morning. Each group answered a series of questions written by the young people. Comments and direct quotes were recorded. The following summary is just that. A brief overview of the views shared is followed by just a few quotes to illustrate what was said.

Placement Choice

Young people have very strong feelings about where they are housed. They believe that their house should feel like their home, somewhere they belong, not just somewhere they stay. Here we look at young people's opinions about placement choices made on their behalf.

They feel that they should be given the right to say 'no' to a potential placement (maybe they don't want to be re-located away from their home town) without the fear of sanctions, being treated differently, or being seen as a troublemaker for standing up for their rights.

Young people find it difficult to 'put down roots'. They find themselves constantly readjusting as they get moved from place to place. Many highlighted the effect this has on their education in particular

They feel that staff should try and put themselves in the shoes of young people to really understand the traumas a young person can go through.

Young people demonstrate an appreciation both of the differing quality of placements and the pressures on staff and carers. Residential care is seen as often being of low quality and "second best".

"Being given suitcases and not black bags"

"If I was listened to about where I wanted to live, rather than just move me to somewhere I don't know"

"I wish they didn't move me all the time, I can't settle down anywhere!"

"In residential homes staff communication is poor, and staff accommodation poor"

"Residential homes are in a bad state of affairs at the moment, there is a lack of staff and a lack of communication"

Overnight Stays

Young people express concern that an ordinarily simple request to stay at their friend's house is over complicated by social services departments. The main concern that young people have is that police checks take too long.

Young people feel that police checks are unnecessary 90% of the time, and that if they are not allowed stopovers generally young people will abscond which will mean that the police will have to be called, which is a waste of their time.

However young people believe that this is one of those no win situations. Police checks are carried out to protect young people but at the same time, they cannot be stopped from going off to their friends.

Young people agree that the social and emotional needs of a young person should be taken into account when a sleepover is requested. If the staff get to know the parents or guardians, maybe it will be easier for sleepovers to be authorised.

Obviously this is done to protect young people, however we must remember that young people who do not live in care do not have to have police checks done prior to sleepovers and we must try to keep care life as similar to family life as possible.

“There’s far too much bureaucracy we need to stop police checks for little matters such as this, my mate Tom stays at his mates house all the time, if he can why can’t I? Am I being punished?”

“If we are not allowed overnight stays, young people will just go AWOL instead, surely it’s better that the staff let us go, rather than us abscond?”

“I’m 16 years old, it’s my life, and my choices, I’ve had to look after myself since I was 11, why should you get to stop me from seeing my friends? This isn’t prison!”

Advocacy and Complaints

From their comments it is clear to our facilitators that a significant number of young people do not know how to make a formal complaint, how the system works and what support young people can access. There is also confusion and misunderstanding about the role of advocates, independent visitors and Children’s Rights Officers.

“Don’t know how to make a complaint. Pointless to do so anyway”

“Complaints? How can we complain when we don’t know how to complain and who to complain to!”

“How do they work? Nobody again showed us, need authority figures to show us”

Complaints

Young people think there needs to be a comprehensive review of the complaints procedures. There should be agreed standards of handling a complaint and advocacy so all young people receive an improved and equal quality of service. Many young people said they would not know where to go for a complaint form. When young people have made a complaint they express their lack of faith and trust in the way their complaints are dealt with, the time it takes to get an outcome, the lack of money available to deal with complaints and advocacy services. Some young people indicated it is very difficult to get accurate information and access complaint forms and do not feel confident about the process or outcome. There needs to be a culture that educates and supports young people to speak openly about their experiences and complaints. Young people generally presented a view that their concerns were not listened to.

“I was worried about how my complaint would be received”

“Depending on what area you come from you get treated differently and should get training when dealing with ethnic and other minorities”

“The idea of passing your problem from person to person can be even worse because it can put you off”

The Role of Independent People in a Complaint Process

Overwhelmingly young people identify that they feel more comfortable talking to totally independent advocates or Children’s Rights Officers when making a complaint. Young people also talked about the importance of peer educators and mentors to guide them through the complaint process and other positive role models like staff who are care experienced. Young people need more information about the role and type of services available from advocacy and Children’s Rights services. A new way of making a complaint should be reviewed and designed by young people, to ensure young people’s experiences (both positive and negative) are used to improve the complaints system. Young people want more opportunities to learn about how to make a complaint through magazine’s written by other young people, case studies of complaints and outcomes, getting together and sharing ideas with other young people and workers.

“There should be an independent person who doesn’t come from social services and isn’t a carer or foster parent”

“Someone who is not involved should listen to young people’s views on complaints”

“Some young people do not know what an advocate is and are worried that an advocate won’t argue their views if they disagree”

The Age of Leaving Care

There was little agreement on a definitive age limit to leaving care but there is agreement that 16 is far too young. Many young people feel that despite the changes in legislation and Government expectations there is still subtle pressure and encouragement to leave before 18.

Overwhelmingly young people expressed how they should be assessed in terms of how prepared and ready they feel and taking into consideration individual circumstances. There should be agreement and negotiation between young people and social services to outline the support, encouragement and resources available to support young people towards independent living and leaving care.

“You should be able to leave care when you are ready”

“When you are ready, when you are 22, when you are independent enough, when you can look after your finances and when you are prepared”

“18, also depends on circumstances. Some young people feel they should be able to stay with a foster family between 18–21”

“Local Authorities should not put pressure, or quietly encourage young people to leave at age 16. There is often an impression of local authorities ‘getting them off the books’ to free up places”

Inequality of Aftercare

Young people describe very different types of accommodation and the difference in quality and suitability of what they have experienced. What is very apparent is that the quality of accommodation needs close scrutiny to safeguard young people’s wellbeing. They feel that accommodation is unequal nationally, there are some positive experiences but most are negative.

Young people want a wider and better choice of accommodation, and need to be provided with effective support and information and to be involved more closely in decisions affecting their choices.

“Local Authorities should be more wary who they get the flats and bed-sits from”

“Bed and Breakfast accommodation is still being used by some authorities to accommodate care leavers and is not adequate”

“Hostels should not be used to accommodate care leavers as they offer few or no support systems for vulnerable young people – any support for care leavers should be provided by the local authority”

Aftercare Support

Young people appreciate the aftercare support they are receiving but feel that it is often not enough and the preparation work that has gone before is inadequate.

Young people had varied experiences and opinions of supported accommodation although there is general agreement that it is a good idea. Young people identified that this support should be good quality and based upon individual need. It should be provided in the widest sense of the word. Support should not only be geared around independent living but also education, health and emotional wellbeing.

“Young people should be visited more than once a week after they have left care”

“Some try to support but after you leave care they feel you can cope”

“Leaving care staff are not teaching young people good hygiene habits”

“They tell you last minute, last minute catches for housing – should be more preparation for leaving care”

“The role of the person offering supported lodgings needs to be clarified, are they meant to be a surrogate family, such as a foster family, or a friend”

Leaving Care Guidance

Young people's knowledge and experience of leaving care guidelines is patchy. In one group only 2 out of 10 had heard of the new legislation. Young people say they need to be better informed about leaving care legislation and how it affects them. Young people also believe they should be involved in informing and writing leaving care guidance and to identify the training needs of young people leaving care.

"Basic guidelines – a book written by young people, written guidelines could help (not clear otherwise)"

"I was given guidelines but social worker don't keep to this"

"Need fact sheet doctors numbers, vets, opticians, hospitals etc. Some leaflets can be useless"

Reviews and Pathway Planning

Young people say that they do not feel in control of their reviews. They feel they are asked questions and opinions sometimes but that these views will be dismissed, as if to say "we had to ask to cover our backs".

"I always got told off in my reviews because I just couldn't help arguing"

"I'm not a wuss or anything, but I got quite intimidated by it because they sit there in their suits and everything and make me feel stupid"

"What's the point of me being there if they're not going to listen to anything I say"

Bullying

Many young people believe that they had been bullied at school because they were in care. Others kept quiet about being in care because they thought they would be bullied if other young people knew. A few young people reported bullying from staff and social workers.

Young people are critical of the support they got when they were bullied and the response of schools. Many feel that more needs to be done to educate other young people about the care system and that young people in care are not different. There were comments, however, about how young people picked up on things which make looked after young people appear different, such as not being able to go to sleepovers or parties.

In one group two young people explained that they feel that the combination of being in care and mixed race made them even more of a target for bullies.

"there should be drama groups going round schools to share the message of why people are in care"

"there should be a deeper understanding between young people because after all, they are in the same boat and should teach each other by sharing their experiences"

Staffing Issues

The most common comments about staff are about the frequency of changes in social worker, key-workers and aftercare workers. Young people talked about the inconsistency and lack of trust that is borne from this. Young people are critical of the fact that workers have to give only one-months-notice. They feel that this is insufficient to end relationships properly.

“There was no hand-over of social workers and it happened during my GCSE’s”

“I know that social workers will get sick and go on leave but where possible workers should give good notice”

Race and Culture

Young people who spoke about race feel that there is racism in the care system. Equally concerning to them is the lack of choice in placements, either because there are not enough foster carers from minority ethnic backgrounds or in one case because a young person was forced to go to black foster carers after being brought up in white establishments.

“I was raised around white family life when I was in care. I wanted a white family, they were having none of it. They said I had to go to a black family”

Money Matters

Comments on the money young people get whilst in care focused on the lack of consistency, the lack of information about what they are entitled to and the difficulty in getting it.

Some young people drew attention to the difference between what young people get in residential care and foster care. It is generally believed that young people in residential care get more pocket money and other benefits. All say that money should be equal both within and across authorities.

Education is generally agreed to be a priority for financial help.

Many say that they have to bargain for money or be very persistent and make many phone calls

“They are obsessed by their budgets, social services say ‘there is no discussion that’s the way it is’ ”

“Social services do not advertise what young people are entitled to. We find out by accident or by harassing (social services)”

“I said give me the money and I will do participation work. I should not have to do this”

“In care I think it should be standard that the cycle needs to be broken, so they know how to break the cycle and how to be good parents”

“My mum and dad were never invited to my reviews, maybe they should have been”

Leaving Care Grants

There is a great amount of confusion around money and grants available for leaving care. Young people need more information about the financial support they are entitled to, and want a direct say in the quality of their home and the goods purchased. Some young people believed a national minimum amount should be set, but were worried about this being seen as a maximum amount by local authorities. If a national standard is set, this should be reviewed regularly. The review process should take into account regional and individual circumstances. Perhaps a national cost analysis should be made to estimate the real costs of moving into independent living and young people should be involved fully in this process.

“We don’t agree it is the right amount to set someone up in a home with, and some of us don’t receive one”

“Instead of receiving money for aftercare grants, receive the goods”

“Consult with young people about grants as a whole. Same amount nation-wide should be in place”

Participation

One group commented that young people feel that they are asked to attend events and consultations and they are asked for feedback. They draw up recommendations and nothing is done after the event. They wanted to know why they are not listened to and who makes the decisions, whether it is councillors or Government officials. This information should be public.



Amplify Computer Based Consultation with Young People

Introduction

The Viewpoint Organisation was invited to the Amplify event to carry out a computer-based consultation with young people. The questions to be asked were devised by A National Voice. All participants remained anonymous. 48 Young People between the ages of 13–21 took part in this consultation. 40% of participants were in care and 55% were leaving care.

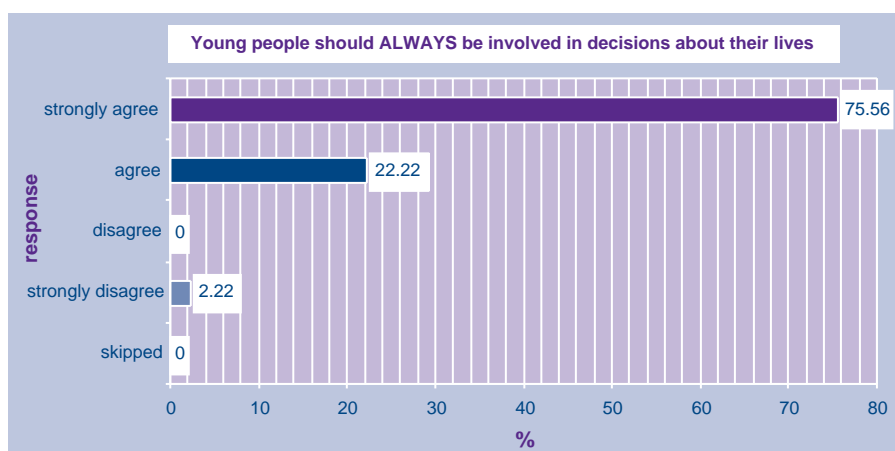
There were 19 questions in total with the first question being a test question to help participants learn how to use the system. Most of the questions were multiple choice with 4 questions requiring open text responses. The Viewpoint computer system is interactive, it uses speech and graphics so as to increase accessibility for everyone. The system requires no supervision – so participants only interact with computer generated characters, so as to offer privacy. All questions contained an option to “skip” so that the participants did not feel under pressure to answer. Most of the questions are related to issues of care, however we also added a few questions about general issues that all young people face. All of the young people’s responses are included in the findings.

Consultation Findings

We asked the participants to respond to the following statement:

‘Young people should ALWAYS be involved in decisions about their lives.’

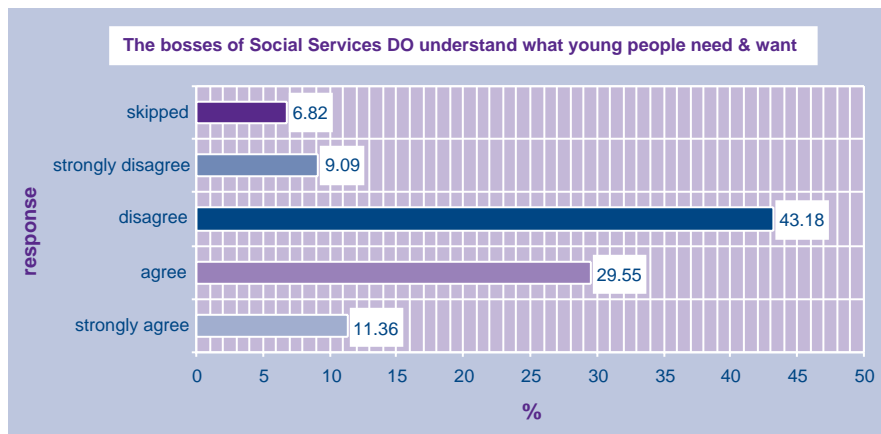
The responses indicate an almost unanimous result to this question, 98% say they agreed – 75% of strongly agreed. It is clear that young people from care feel it is imperative that they are involved in all decisions that affect their lives.



We asked the participants to respond to the following statement:

‘The bosses of Social Services DO understand what young people in care need and want.’

Almost half, disagreed with this statement and 10% strongly disagreed. It is important to note these responses, particularly that the majority of young people do not feel understood by their Corporate Parents. However, 11% say that they strongly agreed that the bosses of Social Services do understand the needs and wants of young people from care.



We asked the participants to respond to the statement:

‘What do you think that social workers and Personal Advisors can do to understand the opinions of young people in care better?’

- The following young people’s responses indicate an almost unanimous view that listening to and acting upon what young people say is paramount. Taking time to talk and listen are very widely mentioned:

“Talk and listen to them” “Listen to them more” “Talk with them” “Listen” “Listen to them more” “Listen to them” “Understand what young people are trying to say” “Listen properly to what young people say” “Just listen, obviously if the young person is capable of making their own choices” “A lot of good kids get treated as bad ones” “Listening” “Listen to us” “Spend some time listening on a one to one meeting” “Sit down and listen to us” “Ask what we want” “Start listening to what children have to say about any part of their life” “Ask them what they want”

- Several young people mention that they should be asked about what they want and that workers need to hear their individual wishes and feelings:

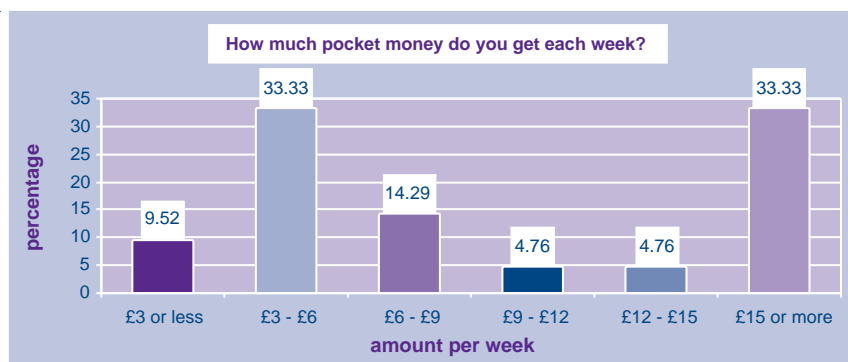
“I think they should take more time with the young person and not have a set time with that young person. They need to understand that young person’s feeling at that time and moment”
“By asking young people what they need, instead of just having a guess, or fitting their ideas into a financial framework, as some young people may need things that other young people don’t”
“I think if they listen more – don’t patronise us and understand that we do have our own lives”
“Ask them how they are feeling and whether or not there is anything worrying them”

- A few young people indicate doubts about professionals being able to understand what it is like to be a young person from care:
 - “If they can understand what we are going through as a young person”
 - “They need to understand”
 - “Be a kid in care themselves and experience what it is like”
- Some participants suggested ways to improve the methods currently used by Social Services:
 - “Try and listen to more young people and see what they want”
 - “Listen to what they say and let them write things in their own worlds and not what they think you should put down”
 - “Listen to the young person and work with them to put their opinions up to the boss”
 - “Social services could also try to listen to them more, and actually listen, not just pretend to, and talk to each other and young people”
 - “If they just talk to them and listen then act on the information they say”
- Several young people suggested that there is a specific need to meet and talk to other care-experienced people:
 - “They could set up groups where care leavers meet up at least 6 monthly and discuss things that affected them in care and ways they would like to improve certain issues”
 - “Do youth groups in which young people can share their views.”
- One young person pointed out the importance of recruiting and training suitable workers:
 - “It’s more about the right kind of people – social workers need more training”

We asked the participants to respond to the question:

‘How much pocket money do you get each week?’

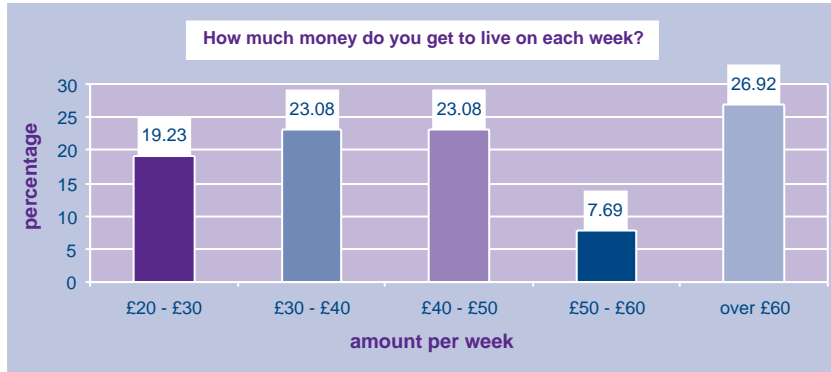
Those in care were asked how much pocket money they get each week; a third got over £15 and a third got £3 to £6 per week. 10% got less than £3.



We asked the participants to respond to the question:

‘How much money do you get to live on each week?’

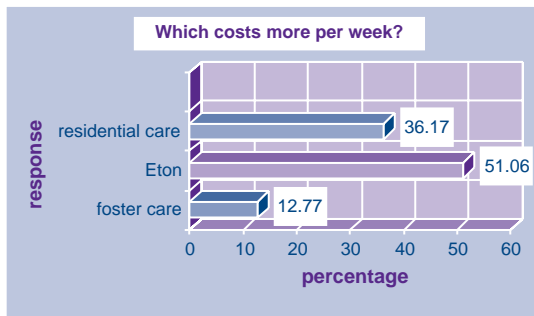
Those who had left care were asked how much money they get to live on each week. 46% say that they got between £33 and £50 a week, 27% get over £60.



We asked participants to respond to the question:

‘Which costs more per week?’ (The correct answer is Residential Care)

Over half of the participants assumed that going to Eton is more costly than living in a children’s home. Just over a third of participants answered correctly, saying that living in a Children’s home costs more per week than a week at Eton. 12% believed that a one-week placement in foster care was the most costly.

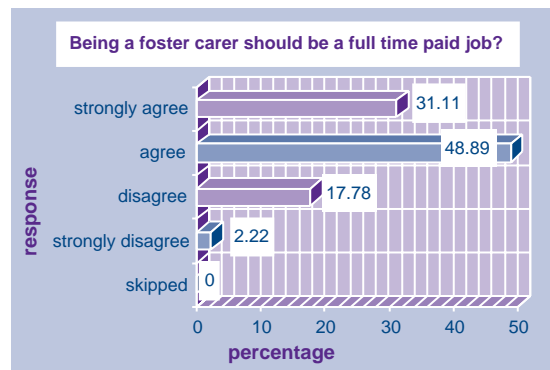


We asked young people to respond to the following statement:

‘Being a foster carer should be a full time, paid job.’

80% of young people said they thought that foster care should be a paid full time job. 17% disagreed and 2% strongly disagreed.

Young people also show a clear understanding of the difficulties experienced by carers as well as themselves.

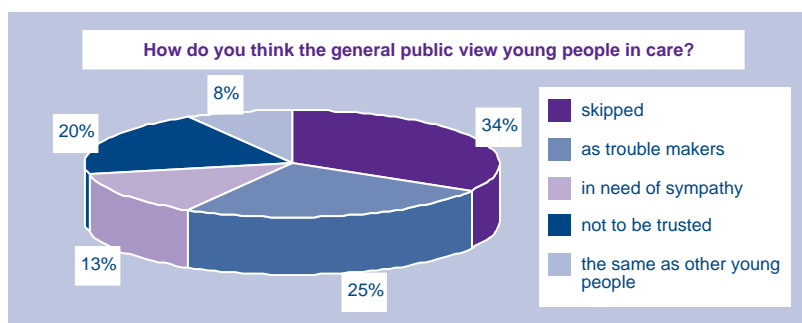


“It is hard for young people and carers alike” “ it is hard on foster carers having to work as well as looking after young people”

We asked the participants to respond to the question:

‘How do you think the general public view young people in care?’

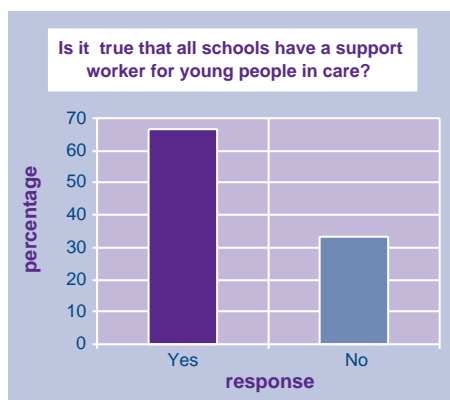
Only 8% of young people say that the general public view young people in care ‘the same as other young people’. This means that the majority of the young people perceived the public’s image of young people from care as *negative* and/or *stereotypical*. One quarter of young people asked said that they thought the general public view them ‘as trouble makers’. One fifth (20%) said that the general public view them as ‘not to be trusted’. Although we don’t know how the general public actually view young people from care, what is most important is that young people from care *think* that the public view them in a negative and or stereotypical way. 13% said that they thought the general public viewed young people in care as ‘in need of sympathy’. It is very important to understand that the majority of the young people questioned said they felt that the public viewed them not in a positive way. Just 8% of young people thought that they were viewed by the public in the same way as other young people who were not from care. This result raises serious questions about the self-image of young people from care. It also points to a widely perceived stereotyping of young people from care. One third of young people skipped this question.



We asked the participants to respond to the questions:

‘Is it true that every school in England must have a special dedicated worker to support young people in care?’

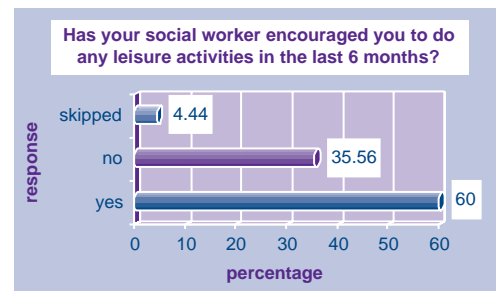
Two thirds of those questioned were aware that every school in England now has a dedicated support worker. 33% said that they did not know about this new worker.



We asked the participants to respond to the question:

‘Has your social worker or personal advisor encouraged you to do any leisure-based activities in the last six months e.g. sport, music, drama, learning to drive?’

The responses to this question were mostly positive – 60% said yes they had been encouraged by their worker to do such activities in the last 6 months. 35% said no they had not been encouraged by their worker to do such activities.



It should be noted that almost all participants expressed a desire to have access to more leisure activities. Sports were mentioned most.

Drama and learning to drive were also popular. Music was mentioned quite a few times. 46 young people chose to answer this question. The following is a complete list of activities and skills that young people from care told us they wish to undertake:

SPORT:

“Playing sport” “Playing for a football team” “Playing sport such as football, darts” “Playing with racing cars, playing football” “I take part in a trampoline club” “I would like to do basketball, football and running, they are my favourite sports” “Sport” “Play badminton” “Swimming” “Football” “I would like to go horse riding” “Football and athletics” “I am currently part of a trampolining group – which is fun and competitive” “Surfing” “I would like to play sports and learn an instrument”

DRAMA:

“Dance” “Taking part in drama” “Drama” “Acting” “Taking part in drama singing and dancing” “Drama” “I have a diploma in acting” “Drama” “Drama and music and also art”

DRIVING:

“ I would like to drive I am taking my test at the moment” “Definitely learning to drive as it gives young people a better chance of finding employment – also there should be cheaper or discount (lessons) for looked after children and those who have left care” “Learn to drive” “To learn to drive would be great, I can't afford it and can't see that will be able to afford it any time soon” “I would like to learn to drive” “Learn to drive” “Learning to drive” “As I am now 20 years of age I would like to learn to drive” “Learning to drive” “I would like to learn to drive so that I could get to places a lot easier”

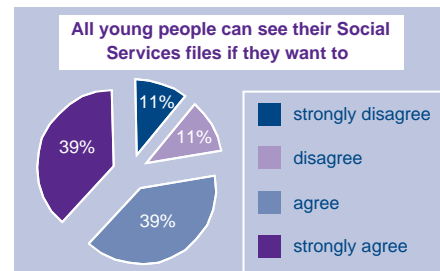
MUSIC:

“Learning and instrument” “Music” “Drumming” “I would like to be a DJ” “Playing the drums” Young people also said: “I would like to do fashion design” “All of them” “Running, poetry and driving” “Riding a horse” “Horse riding” “Hockey, Rugby, Art and Crafts, Youth work and Learning Spanish”

We asked participants to respond to the statement:

‘All young people in and leaving care can easily get to see their Social Services Files if they want to.’

Three quarters (77%) of young people knew that they could see their Social Services files if they wanted. Although this is positive it should be noted that 23% did not. Of this 23% half of these strongly disagreed that they could easily see their files.



We asked the participants to respond to the statement:

‘Young people have to do TOO MANY exams’

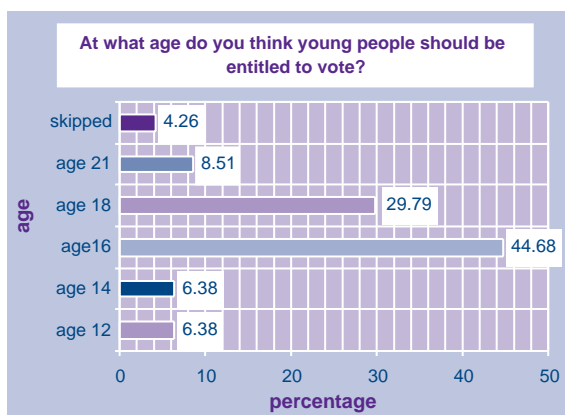
Almost half of those asked agreed that young people have to do too many exams, 16% of those strongly agreed. 44% disagreed. The responses show a fair split with similar numbers agreeing and disagreeing.



We asked the participants to respond to the question:

‘At what age do you think people should be allowed to vote?’

The majority (57%) said that the current age of voting should be lowered, 44% of those said that the voting age should be age 16. However one third of those questioned said that the current age of voting should remain as aged 18. 8% said the voting age should be raised to 21.



We asked the participants to respond to the question:

'What do you want us to tell Tony Blair about what it is like to be in care in England?'

It is particularly important for people to read all the point that young people make in their answers to this question. Note that some suggest that it is only possible for others to understand what it is like to be in care through personal experience.

- Many young people from care express concern that Tony Blair doesn't understand what it is like to be in care.

"Tell him it's not much fun" **"To not treat young people in care differently and make sure we can live a normal life"** **"Make him experience it for himself in a poor environment"** **"If you could just spend a few days in care and see just see how we are treated and the way we are being looked after. It's so hard for a young person to live in care without the love from his or her family"** **"It is a very unhelpful system, why can't you listen to those who have been through it to guide Social Services to improve peoples lives not just constrain what you do to fit into what money is available"** **"That everyone wants to help young people but no-one does the leg work"** **"In care it is a really sad thing because we are not living with are own parents"** **"I think he should come and visit once a year to find out for his self, to listen to our opinions and to find out for his self"**

- Young people show a clear understanding of the difficulties experienced by carers as well as themselves:

"It is hard for young people and carers alike" **"I would like to explain to Tony Blair that it is hard on foster carers having to work as well as looking after young people"**

- Some indicate that care is not as bad as they might have expected, one participant described care as a fairly positive experience:

"Some of the system is good – some bad, you can't really class being in care as one experience. I had good times and bad, good support and bad support" **"It's alright being in care and it gives you a head start in life"**

- There are indications of concern about stereotyping and the possibilities of leading a normal life. Our findings show that only 8% of those asked felt that the general public viewed young people from care the same as other young people:

"Children in care are no different from kids that are not in care" **"I would like him to say that just because we are in care doesn't mean that everyone is in there for the same reason we are in there because we have our reasons and nobody should put us down"** **"To not treat young people in care differently and make sure we can live a normal life"**

- Young people from care want to give the following messages about care to Tony Blair:

"That it needs to be better" **"That it's hard because you get dumped in places and moved when you are just settled and that people judge you because you are in care. It can be fun and you get more pocket-money than when you are at home"** **"He should be more informed and up to date"** **"It is not very nice not being without our families"** **"That the government should put in more funding so young people in care have as normal a life as possible"** **"It's not that good to be in care"** **"Social Services needs improving"**



Young People's Thoughts on Amplify

After the event all the young people who attended were sent a feedback questionnaire. They were asked to answer two questions with a list of answers to choose from. Four other questions invited text responses. An incentive of a draw for store vouchers was offered to anyone who sent the form back promptly.

We asked the participants to respond to the question:

'What do you think of your workshops?'

Responses were:

Well planned _____	10	Crap _____	1
Interesting _____	16	Decent _____	7
Good selection _____	12	Creative _____	9
Funny _____	6	Educational _____	8
A good laugh _____	13	Good _____	4
Inspiring _____	6	Limited Choice _____	3
Too short _____	10	Motivating _____	6
Fantastic _____	4	Informative _____	6
Just long enough _____	4		

Other possible choices received no responses. They were:

"weak" "poor" "dull" "amazing" "too long" and "boring"

We asked the participants to respond to the question:

'What words best describe the consultation on Sunday morning?'

Rushed _____	10	Interesting _____	10
Respectfully done _____	7	Powerful _____	6
Same old stuff _____	4	New ideas _____	9
Tokenistic _____	2	Informative _____	9
Team building _____	10		

Young people could add their own comments to this list. These mostly related to how the participants rarely had the opportunity to hear what other young people think. Two young people commented on how rushed the morning was with so much to say and not enough time to do it. Two said that they thought it was boring.

“It was very powerful because lots of people put their views forward, which is what we are aiming for”

We asked the participants to respond to the question:

‘What issues do you think A National Voice should be campaigning for?’

The majority of replies referred to the need for A National Voice to ensure that young people are listened to and to address the stigma of being in care. Many replies referred to the need to campaign for equal rights, some specific issues were:

**“child abuse” “help for young people at University” “better and more choice in foster care”
“leaving care grant” “driving lessons for all care leavers” “leaving care placements”
“more contact with social workers”**

We asked the participants to respond to the question:

‘If you were organising a similar event what else would you like to see?’

The responses were very varied, the most common being that it should have lasted longer. Most responses would like more activities, go carting and football feature often, and a more varied Saturday night entertainment, karaoke is mentioned many times.

Many people believe that they would make the event better organised, particularly better communication about the programme and activities.

We asked the participants to respond to the question:

‘What do you think about the accommodation and food?’

There were mixed comments about the food, many felt that it had been one of, if not the only, low point of the event. Ideas for improving it were more choice and more information in advance about the menus.

Views on the accommodation were much more positive. Most responses say it was good and that staying at a university was a good idea.

Finally, we asked the participants to respond to the question:

‘Would you like to get involved in A National Voice and are you involved in any groups who would like to get involved?’

Eleven young people say they would like to get more involved in A National Voice. Six of these are already involved in local children’s rights groups or an in-care group.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report.



A National Voice presents ... Amplify: The Recommendations

The following is a list of recommendations about the Care System in England by young people from Care who attended the AMPLIFY consultation event. This event was designed and delivered by young people from A National Voice – the only national organisation run by and for young people from Care. The AMPLIFY residential event took place at Leicester University in August 02 and was the largest ever gathering of young people from Care. 150 young people from Care attended the event. The following recommendations are taken from the AMPLIFY report which was written by A National Voice and launched at the House of Commons in March 03. Many thanks to over fifty Local Authorities around England who sponsored young people to attend AMPLIFY. If you have any influence over the lives of young people from Care please read and act upon these recommendations. The full AMPLIFY Report is available from A National Voice office on 0161 237 5577 or info@anationalvoice.org

1. Placement Choice

We recommend that young people are given more information about placements prior to moving and that more choice of placement is available. Young people should be able to meet the new cares and their family before agreeing to the placement (except emergency placements). Boundaries and expectations should always be made clear and agreed prior to moving to a new placement.

2. Complaints and Advocacy

We recommend a national review of complaints procedures and particularly the provision of full access to an advocate for all young people from Care.

3. Overnight Stays / Sleepovers

We recommend that a national Sleepover Strategy be agreed and implemented for all young people from Care, especially as some Social Services departments have already done this. Sleepover policies should be implemented to ensure that young people from Care feel the same as their 'non-care' peers in that their (corporate) parents allow them to sometimes stay over at a friend's house, while remaining safe, without months of red tape.

4. Leaving Care

We recommend that all young people are fully informed about their Leaving Care entitlements prior to their 15th birthday. A standard leaving Care Guide should be available written by Care Leavers and Advocates.

A National minimum amount of £2000 for the Leaving Care Grant should be set with appropriate weighting reflecting local costs.

Better housing options for Care Leavers should be available, as it is not acceptable to place Care Leavers in bed and breakfast.

5. Care Staff and Social Workers

We recommend that young people from Care participate widely in the training and recruitment of Care Staff.

We recommend that working conditions and pay be improved for Care Staff and Foster Carers.

We recommend that young people should never be without access to a Social Worker.

We recommend and support an awareness campaign to raise the esteem of Care Staff and Social Workers, which will help reduce the frequent changes of Social Workers in the lives of young people.

We recommend that there is more access to mentoring schemes for young people from Care, to supplement the roles of carers and professionals

6. Esteem and Wellbeing

We recommend that Social Services recognise, respect and reward the unique and special skills and talents of all the young people from Care in England. New initiatives and better training should be introduced to raise general awareness of Care issues and to actively promote a positive image of young people from Care. Anti-bullying strategies should be more wide spread.

Corporate parents have a duty to reduce stigma, raise esteem, safeguard and promote the wellbeing of all young people from Care.

7. Race and Culture

We recommend policy makers increase their attempts to integrate and communicate with young people from ethnic minorities in order to promote the diverse needs of young people from Care.

A National Voice



Moving to a new foster placement is never easy. How can Foster Care be better? We asked care experienced Young People to say how Social Services can improve foster placements. This is what they said.

BEFORE MOVING TO A NEW FOSTER PLACEMENT LET US . . .

- Visit and have info about the new place and meet the new people (except in emergencies)
- Have clear boundaries and expectations

DURING THE FOSTER PLACEMENT LET US . . .

- Have easy access to Advocates, especially in our Reviews
- Have useful Contacts and Info about Care related issues
- Have the same access to consultations as those in Residential Care
- Have more access to groups for people from Care

WHEN LEAVING THE FOSTER PLACEMENT LET US . . .

- Have a post-placement Contact Plan before we say goodbye, especially when we have to leave foster brothers and sisters
- Not have to move our things in bin bags !

Footnote: Since this report was first published we are pleased to say that there has been progress in the two following areas:

1. Complaints and advocacy ¶there is now an automatic right to an independent advocate for all children and young people wishing to make a complaint about the services they receive.
2. Sleepover strategy ¶The minister for children, Margaret Hodge has sent a circular to all local authorities clarifying this issue making it easier for people from Care to stay at a friend's house overnight.

A National Voice would like to thank the following Local Authorities and staff for enabling young people to attend **amplify**

Bexley	Hull	Redbridge
Bolton	Islington	Sefton
Bournemouth	Kensington & Chelsea	Solihull
Brighton & Hove	Kent	Somerset
Buckinghamshire	Kirklees	South Gloucestershire
Bury	Knowsley	South Tyneside
Calderdale	Lambeth	St Helens
Camden	Lancashire	Stockport
Cheshire	Leeds	Stoke-on-Trent
Coventry	Leicestershire	Sunderland
Cumbria	Lewisham	Surrey
Derby	Merton	Thurrock
Essex	Middlesborough	Wandsworth
Flintshire	Norfolk	Wakefield
Gloucestershire	North Tyneside	West Berkshire
Greenwich	Nottinghamshire	Westminster
Halton	Oldham	Windsor & Maidenhead
Hertfordshire	Oxfordshire	
Hounslow	Peterborough	



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