



These Matter To Us

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A National Voice
position paper
on the new
'Care Matters'
Bill

Charity Number: 1120149



Introduction

A National Voice is a charity run **by** and **for** Care experienced young people. Our aim is to create positive changes to the Care system and to provide a platform to hear the voices of over 90,000 children and young people in and Leaving Care in England. Our trustees are Care-experienced young people.

We at ANV welcome the 'Care Matters' White Paper and the long overdue attention being paid to improving the Care System to achieve more positive outcomes for children in Care and Care Leavers. While it is clear that the system does fail numbers of children, many children and young people in Care have **positive messages** to give and want to actively help to improve things.

Over the last four years we have collected and represented the views of over 3,000 children and young people from Care on a number of areas all of which are relevant to Care Matters. We gathered 23,000 words in response to the Government's Green Paper consultation.

This position paper outlines those views and issues that children and young people from Care think should be given **priority** in the 'Care Matters' Bill; the most important chance for change in 30 years!

Amplify



Over 50 local authorities sponsored young people to attend Amplify. It was a two day residential event which gave over 150 children and young people the opportunity to consult their peers on the issues that were important to them and say what they wanted to change. These included:

- ▶ *More information about residential and foster placements before they went to live there*
- ▶ *An opportunity to meet the people they were going to live with before a foster or residential placement started*
- ▶ *More choice of placements as well as better pay and training for foster carers and professionals*
- ▶ *Information about Carers expectations and boundaries before a placement starts*
- ▶ *Better access to independent advocates*

We intend to run another Amplify event in Summer 2008. Please get in touch with us for more information.

Education Education Education

In summer 2006 A National Voice published 'Please Sir! Can I Have Some More?' a

Please Sir!
can I have some more?

report which demonstrated the importance young people place on good educational support. 218 children and young people completed a survey on their care and education **experiences** and had **clear views** on what could be improved. The key findings were that young people wanted:

- ▶ *More say in the choices of schools and education and more access to education*
- ▶ *Better support from teachers in school, but without singling them out because of their Care status as well as extra tuition to catch up if they have fallen behind at school*
- ▶ *To be able to stay in Care and get support until they had finished GCSE and 'A' levels*
- ▶ *More support for out of school education – things such as access to computers, somewhere quiet to do homework etc.*

No Place Like Home



One of the most **basic** human needs is for somewhere **safe** and pleasant to live, but for many Care Leavers the transition to independent living is characterised by **unsuitable** and **insecure** accommodation. The average age for leaving home is 24 but Care Leavers are expected to move to 'independent adult life' much younger, some from age 17. We surveyed almost 600 people – young Care Leavers, Housing Professionals and Leaving Care Workers – and gathered their views about what should change in order to improve housing and support. They recommended that:

- ▶ *There should be funding for a nationwide scheme of 'halfway houses' for young Care Leavers and extended floating support for young people with their own tenancies*
- ▶ *Local authorities should provide better 'out of hours' support for young Care Leavers.*
- ▶ *Care Leavers need ongoing financial, emotional and practical support and a chance to return to care if things are not working out*
- ▶ *Pathway Plans should have specific plans about how young people will be helped to integrate with their new neighbours and communities*

This Is NOT A Suitcase

Many children in and Leaving Care told us they have to suffer the **indignity** of having their belongings put into bin bags whenever they move. This gives a **negative**



message – that these belongings are 'rubbish' and young people **tell** us that it is one of the things they dislike the most. For three years now, A National Voice has been running a campaign asking local authorities to sign our 'No Bin Bag' charter pledging **not** to use bin bags to move belongings. We staged the 'Refuse Collection' fashion show four times including two shows at the Tate Britain, modelling clothes made from bin bags in a 'catwalk protest'. So far over 90 local authorities out of 150 have signed the Charter. We want to see the Government encourage **all** local authorities to sign up.

Brothers & Sisters



- Over 100 young people told us about the difficulties they **often** have around contact with siblings. The 'Brothers and Sisters' survey revealed:
- ▶ *Over three quarters of the young people felt they did not see enough of their brothers and sisters and would like to see them more regularly.*
 - ▶ *10% of them said that it was very difficult for them to see any of their brothers and sisters*
 - ▶ *The two main reasons for not seeing them was either because it cost too much or they lived too far away*
 - ▶ *Some of the young people reported that no one had helped them to keep in touch*
 - ▶ *There is a need for specific and dedicated budgets for sibling contact*

Supersonic



Marilyn Monroe, Malcolm X, John Lennon... these are all individuals who have experienced **some** kind of Care and were able to break through any **barriers** that may have come with that experience to pursue goals and achieve success. ANV celebrates positive, Care-experienced role models from all walks of life. We have made a video and a dedicated website. Ambassadors include former Care Leavers like Samantha Morton (actress), Mark Bright (ex-footballer) and Kriss Akabusi (athlete). All friends of ANV!

LILAC

LILAC is our own quality kitemark designed and delivered by Care-experienced young people and awarded to service providers who meet all 7 **standards** of Involvement and Participation. Please contact us for details about the kitemark assessment and our menu of training packages.



Summary

Children and young people who have been in Care are **clear** about what their priorities are for changes to the Care system, in essence they want:

- ▶ *More information and choice about what happens to them and their opinions taken into account*
- ▶ *To have stability in both Care and school places.*
- ▶ *To not have to move to independent living until they are ready*
- ▶ *To have safe and decent accommodation when they leave Care with a package of support*
- ▶ *To have the chance to meet and share experiences with others from Care*
- ▶ *To be able to make mistakes and still get support as young adults, just like their peers*
- ▶ *To ensure the new 'Pledges' (promises) & the 'Children In Care Councils' are constituted, representative and non-tokenistic and that Elected Members and Directors of Children's Services are fully accountable.*

Really, it's nothing more than anyone would provide for their **own** child – which is what we want. Politicians, councillors, local authorities and child care professionals should always ask themselves '**Would this be good enough for my child?**' If it isn't then it **isn't** good enough for children in Care.

